

The Scrivener

2021-2022



Table of Contents

cover photograph by Austin York

The Secret by Alex Frank	2
A Star and a Telescope by Seamus Flanagan	12
A Flipped Life by Alex Hornsey	20
Rick Bam by Alex Frank	29
Alex by Max Baumgartner	35
Coffee Notes by Chris Schilligo	44

The Scrivener 2021-2022 The De Smet Jesuit High School Literary Magazine

Moderator
Robert Hutchison

Staff

Max Baumgartner
Jacob Bush
Jonah Evans
Seamus Flanagan
Shane Ford
Alex Frank

Gavin Greiner
Luke Halski
Jackson Hogan
Alex Hornsey
Ethan Knabe
DeShawn Leatherberry

Jack Manuel
Joe McCook
Thomas O'Shea
Sam Reeder
Diego Romero
Chris Schilligo-Wheeler

Karl Terry
Alex Tomasella
Frank Vacca
Cameron Wallace
Austin York

Special Thanks to

Kevin Berns, Carrie Becher, Debbie Higgins, Laurie Kohler, and Emily Ledbetter

The Secret

by Alexander Frank, '22

Sitting in the back left corner of the classroom at West Phoenix High School in Arizona, best friends Brendan and Andrew stared two rows ahead of them. Brendan was bigger than Andrew - about 5'9" - and Andrew was around 5'5". It was the first day of high school and they were in the eleventh grade. Two rows ahead of them was the new girl in the school. The teacher's words were drowned out in the background as the two just stared at her blonde curly hair that went to her shoulders, her light brown skin, and the loose white shirt she was wearing. Andrew was staring harder than Brendan when he felt a sharp pain in his left bicep, Brendan had punched him.

"You just gonna keep staring at her?"

"Dude, you were staring at her too. You can't tell me to pay attention when you're not paying attention as well," Andrew whispered. He was gripping his left bicep because Brendan hit him pretty good.

"I'm just saying, you know I'm going to forget half the stuff the teacher's saying right now, and I got you making googly eyes at the back of a girl's head. What's that gonna do? Nothing. You're not going to talk to her or anything." Brendan then leaned back and went on his phone ignoring the teacher again.

Andrew punched Brendan in his right arm making a loud slap noise in the classroom. Brendan responded by swinging back but missing. The two laughed softly but then looked forward to see everyone in the class looking at them. The girl was staring right into the eyes of Andrew with a little smile on her face which made him blush. He stared into her beautiful brown eyes but the moment was cut when the teacher started yelling at them.

"I know you two are going to be trouble already! First day of school. I'm going through the materials and you two are goofing around! No more. One of you is moving next class period!"

"Man, look what you got us into," Brendan whispered.

"Me? This ain't my fault, you were the one who wouldn't let me stare at the girl," Andrew joked.

"Yeah, I'm not letting you stare at her cause you're not going to talk to her. Saving your time and class time."

"How much you want to bet?"

"Oh, you gonna talk to her? I want to see this Andrew, I want to see you walk up to her when the bell rings, and have a conversation with her. What will you say? 'Hey I'm Andrew, I like to play video games after school and eat Pop Tarts'. Where's that gonna get you?" Brendan looked forward at the girl eyeing her up and down. "Face it dog, she's a nine. You're like a six."

"Shut up man. Watch me when that bell rings."

A couple of minutes go by with the teacher covering class materials some more, Brendan zoning out and staring at the ceiling, while Andrew planned on what he was going to say to her. Many ideas went through his head but each one he would shake away trying to come up with something cool or smart to try to impress her. Eventually, the bell rang, all the students began grabbing their bags. Brendan and Andrew stood

up at the same time looked at each other, Brendan laughed and Andrew looked nervous but laughed a little. They looked forward to see the girl stand up. She was about 5'8" wearing some gray sweatpants, a loose white shirt, and plain white shoes. Andrew took a deep breath and then took a step forward.

"Don't say anything stupid," Brendan said in the background.

Andrew flipped Brendan off as he slowly walked forward eventually getting right next to her and then turning around to Brendan smiling. Brendan nodded and pointed at the girl. Andrew tapped her on the shoulder to get her attention. She jumped up quickly grabbing Andrew's wrist squeezing it hard.

"Aw damn! My bad I was just trying to get your attention!" Andrew yelled. He tried to pull his wrist away, but her grip was real tight. Brendan was laughing so hard in the corner watching the event unfold.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I just have really good reflexes." She let go of Andrew's wrist slowly. "I'm Taina."

"Andrew. I'm really sorry about that, I'm not good at saying hi to people." He shook his wrist looking at it seeing that she had left some red marks on his brown skin from how tight her grip was.

"It's okay. Sorry for grabbing you so hard. I see you got some good punches too." She looked back at Brendan when saying that.

"Yeah, Brendan and I always play like that. We've known each other since we were kids. He's like my brother." Andrew explained. Brendan came walking over and put his arm around Andrew's shoulders.

"Andrew we got to get to the next class man. Talk to your girlfriend later," Brendan said as he pulled Andrew away. "We'll see you later on and Andrew loves you lots!"

Brendan pushed Andrew into the busy hall laughing while Andrew kept turning around to see if Taina was behind them. Andrew was upset at Brendan and punched him in the stomach. Brendan punched him back. The two laughed and continued to walk down the hall, dodging and weaving all the students.

"Why'd you cut my conversation man? You were jealous or something wasn't you?" Andrew wondered.

"I wasn't jealous, that's all you! We just got to focus on other things than girls. You did a good job talking to her though. I'm surprised you lasted that long with her almost breaking your wrist. She know Kung-Fu or something?"

"I don't know, but that hurt! Look, you can still see the red marks from her fingers." Andrew showed Brendan his wrist. Brendan examined it up and down and looked around it.

"What are you some kind of doctor now?"

"No, I'm just thinking she had some grip on your wrist dude. She for real could have broken it!" Brendan let go and then looked concerned. "Maybe you shouldn't be messing with her bro. You're all fragile."

They then laughed and Andrew punched him. "Man I'm not fragile! You'll see bro. I think I got a chance with her."

"If you say so. I'll catch you after school. We still hanging out?"

"For sure! I'll text you when I'm at my car."

Two months into the school year, Taina and Andrew were in a relationship. They would hang out constantly during and after school with each other and Brendan would join them during school. After a while Brendan would go to his house instead of going out with them. Brendan

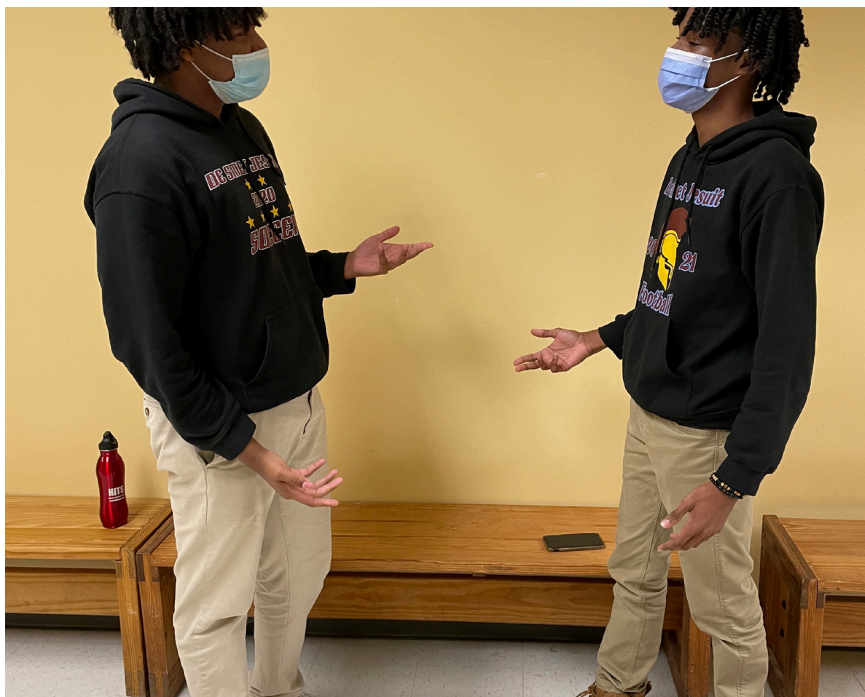


photo by Alexander Frank, '22

had plenty of other girls he hung out with, but he mainly wanted to hang out with Andrew. With Taina around, though, Andrew's attention was all on her. On a Saturday Brendan and Andrew were driving around the city of Phoenix just to hang out.

"Dude I'm telling you she's like perfect man. She like's Rock music like me, she loves video games, and she knows how to fight! Like I'm talking MMA type fighting," Andrew bragged.

"She sounds really great man. Real great," Brendan said sarcastically. "Anything else I should know about her?"

"She's part Brazilian. She was born in the United States, but her family is Brazilian. Whole different country man!"

"Technically we're all from different countries, but cool man, that's really great." Brendan didn't take his eyes off the road as he drove, still making the same straight-faced expression. He was bored. When they used to hang out, they would go and cause trouble or play video games and talk about who's the hottest Hooters girl at their local Hooters, but nothing was the same for him anymore.

"You okay man?"

"Not really, all you do is talk about her man. Remember when we used to do stuff, like go skateboarding or shoot paintballs at abandoned houses? It's just not the same. All you do is hang with Taina all the time, and you never want to hang with your homeboy. I remember when I had a girlfriend. I made sure we would all hang out and you never felt like a third wheel, but you do you, man," Brendan explained.

"Dude, I'm sorry man. It's just been a while since I've had a girlfriend and she's amazing. I didn't mean to throw you to the side or anything

like that. I'm going to hang with you more and not talk about her as much." Andrew then punched Brendan in the arm to get a laugh out of him. It worked and Brendan punched him back.

A couple of weeks went by and Brendan would notice Taina in the halls taking a lot of phone calls off in the distance standing away from everyone. He would casually walk by and hear her speaking Portuguese in a low voice. Eventually, Taina noticed Brendan walking by her a lot, so she would move locations to take her phone calls but Brendan would look for her concerned that she was cheating on Andrew.

"I swear she has some hot Brazilian boyfriend and she is cheating on you. She's always on the phone with him speaking Portuguese so no one can understand her," Brendan said to Andrew while they were at lunch.

"She could be talking to her family. They may not be able to speak English so she talks to them in Portuguese. You're just trying to get us to break up," Andrew argued. He looked around the packed lunchroom for Taina, but then went back to eating.

"Man I'm trying to look out for you! Quit being ignorant. If she wanted to talk to family she can do that at home. There's no need to be sneaking off in the halls, and she knows I'm watching her. I got her hiding!" Brendan looked around the lunchroom too. When he spotted Taina walking into the lunchroom, he tapped Andrew on the shoulder. "Look who it is."

The two watched her walk to a table with other girls. She had her headphones in and didn't look up from her phone. The other girls tried to talk to her, but she didn't hear them. Brendan gave Andrew a look with wide eyes nodding his head in the direction of Taina, implying that he should go over there. Andrew shook his head no and they just watched her. She had her backpack on and then took it off and dug through it, getting upset she zipped it up and ran out of the lunchroom.

"Well isn't that just interesting?" Brendan scoffed.

"Shut up man, I'll figure it out." Andrew stood up quickly, chasing after her as she ran out of the lunchroom. He eventually caught up to her as she was walking quickly down the hall as he called out her name she eventually turned around looking surprised.

"Hey Andrew, what are you doing?" She tried to act calm when asking the question but she was shaking.

"Aw, just seeing what you were up to. I haven't seen you around in a while and was just making sure we were ok." Andrew noticed her shaking and then he looked confused. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything's fine. I've just been having a lot of family issues going on. We are okay babe. I'm sorry we haven't hung out in a while. It's just... it's just a lot going on right now." She turned around slowly to walk away, covering her face so Andrew couldn't see that she was upset.

Andrew felt defeated, the conversation didn't go as planned and he didn't expect her to walk away so quickly from him. He was thinking Brendan was right and she was cheating on him. He turned around slowly and drug his feet back into the lunchroom putting his earbuds in. The walk to the lunchroom was long. It felt like everything around him was blurry and distant. When Andrew got to the lunch table he sat down and just stared at his food not moving much while Brendan kept pushing his shoulder trying to get his attention.

"Hey! What is wrong with you? Dude! Hey!"

Andrew turned his music up a little louder and drowned everyone out even more. Eventually, Brendan left him alone feeling down and everyone

at the table just went back to their normal conversation. Every once and a while Brendan would look over to see Andrew still in the same position. He began to feel angry seeing his friend so down from a relationship brought flashbacks to his old ones and he didn't want to see Andrew in the same position. The lunch bell rang and, as they stood up, a plan began to form in Brendan's head to confront Taina.

As the school day went on, Andrew's emotion remained the same. Taina tried to talk to him for a little acting like the situation at lunch didn't happen and Andrew nonchalantly brushed her off instead of hanging out with her after school. She was fine with that and they both walked opposite ways. Brendan watched from the distance in his car. He saw Taina get into her car and waited for Andrew to arrive at his which was parked next to him. When Andrew got to his car, Brendan slowly rolled the window down.

"How's it going?" Brendan asked. He was locked onto Taina staring straight at her car, watching her fumble around with objects inside that he couldn't make out.

"It's going good man, I'm just going to head home and get some homework done. Not really in the mood to hang out," Andrew replied.

"All good. I got to get some work done at home as well. Call me if you need help with any of your homework, I'll be right over."

Just then Taina began to pull out of the parking lot. Brendan started his car up and nodded off to Andrew. He began to follow Taina keeping a good distance between his car and hers. He planned to see if she was cheating on Andrew and wanted to follow her to whatever house she was going to and do a classic stakeout. He wanted to catch her in the act and make her feel miserable about it.

The drive was about fifteen minutes long and they ended up in a run-down neighborhood. The houses were small and had small metal fences that separated them from each other. There was no grass in each of the yards Brendan passes, just dirt or sand. The sidewalk was cracked and beat up and most of the houses didn't have a mailbox. If they did, it was old and metal. The driveways were small and skinny. The only car that would perfectly fit without going on the yards would be a Prius.

Brendan took a long stop at a stop sign as he watched from the distance as Taina pulled into a driveway of one of the homes and got out. Slinging her backpack over her shoulder, she quickly ran inside locking her car door then unlocking the house door. There were two other cars parked outside the house. Brendan assumed that one of them was the boy she was seeing. After waiting a couple of seconds, he slowly turned down the street and parked on the side across from the house. His windows in his car were a little tinted. He was hoping no one would see him, but the windows in the house were all covered up. He waited a little longer, sitting there patiently before going on his phone began to scroll through Snapchat. He was getting bored but each time would manage to try to stay focused on the house.

Ten minutes passed and a man stepped outside the house and smoked a cigarette on the front porch. Brendan quickly looked up. The man was around 5'11", had dark brown skin, short black hair, and a scar over his left eye. Brendan guessed his age was around nineteen or twenty. He was very muscular, it looked like he had been playing football all his life and he wore a tight white tank-top.

"That has to be the hot Brazilian boyfriend. I knew it," Brendan said just eyeing the man.



photo by Alexander Frank, '22

After he finished the cigarette, he opened the door. Taina was standing there smiling as they both walked in closing the door behind them. This motivated Brendan to get out of his car. He aggressively walked across the street preparing himself to fight the man he saw. He wasn't scared. His anger had taken over him and he banged on the front door. Taina came and opened the door.

"Brendan? What are you doing here?" she asked. She had the door cracked a little bit and was just sticking her head out from the crack.

"I could ask you the same thing. What are you doing here? And where is he? I saw him and I'm ready to settle something with him." Brendan said trying to look into the house. "Open the door!"

"No, this is my house! What are you even talking about settle something with him and who are you talking about?"

"Don't play dumb!" At this point, Brendan pushed the door open and stepped inside. His heart dropped.

There was a table in the front room with pictures of United States government officials, nine-millimeter bullet casings, a Tec-Nine gun, and multiple pistols. Brendan scanned the house some more to see a Brazilian flag hanging up, multiple propaganda photos, and blueprints of the insides of what looked to be like people's homes.

The man knocked Brendan out from behind hitting him in the back of the head with a wooden board. Brendan hit the floor hard making a loud thud. Taina quickly shut the door and locked it as the man began to drag Brendan's body down the stairs to the basement.

Andrew lay on his bed staring at the ceiling. He was still mellow, keeping to himself with music in his ears. Eventually, he felt a little better and decided to give Brendan a call. When he called, it went to voicemail. It didn't bother Andrew, so he waited a little then called again. The second time it went to voicemail. Andrew then texted Brendan asking if he wanted to hang out. A few more minutes went by and there was no response. Thinking he was asleep, Andrew then thought about Taina. He wanted to see her and talk to her since the conversation at lunch didn't go as he planned. He got up and went out to his car and began to drive to her house. As he drove, he had the feeling that nothing was wrong and she was having family issues trying to stay optimistic and hopefully giving her a surprise visit might cheer her up.

At Taina's house, Brendan woke up in the basement tied down to a wooden chair with ropes. The basement had one light in it and was very small with cement walls. There was nothing down there but the wooden chair. His mouth had tape over it and he darted his eyes around trying to see what was going on. The man came down the wooden stairs and walked up to Brendan ripping the tape off his mouth. Brendan grunted then looked up at the man.

"For you two cheating on someone, this sure is extreme!" Brendan yelled. He shook the chair violently.

"You don't understand anything American boy," the man said with a heavy accent. "You were not supposed to see anything."

"That's why it's called cheating. I know I'm not supposed to see anything, I'm not retarded."

The man looked confused, then leaned forward right in Brendan's face. "Why would I cheat with someone who is my sister?" he softly whispered.

Brendan's face dropped. Then he tried to scoot the chair back a little

because he was uncomfortable. The man had a small grin on his face as he watched Brendan's emotion change from confidence to shock.

"Sorry man, I, I didn't know she was your sister. You see what I thought was..."

"What you saw is more important than what you thought. Upstairs, when you rudely came into our home, what did you see? And be honest, it will make things much easier." He put his hand on Brendan's shoulder, looking directly into his eyes.

"Look man, I didn't see anything! I was just coming in expecting to see you two making out. I didn't see anything!"

"You did see something because you were going to swear before I knocked you out. Which is also very rude when entering someone's home. Just tell me what you saw."

Brendan darted his eyes around once again debating if he should tell what he saw on the table or not. He started thinking of options of how to escape or how to convince him to let him go. Thinking about the scene from the Avengers movie where Black Widow broke from the chair and fought off the Russians that were holding her captive he shifted his feet some trying to pull off what she did. The man watched as his feet moved back and forth and then Brendan ended up knocking himself over from swaying in the chair too much, hitting the ground with a loud slam. The man laughed and slowly lifted him back up then stood there quietly.

"I'm waiting," he said.

Outside the house, Andrew pulled up in his car and noticed Brendan's car parked across the street. Confused, he parked his car behind it and walked up slowly to see if he was inside it. When he noticed Brendan wasn't in there, Andrew wondered if his best friend was the one with who his girlfriend was cheating on him. He stayed calm and collected himself as he walked across the street and up to the front door knocking on it. A few seconds went by and Taina came and opened the door sticking her head out.

"Andrew? What are you doing here?" she asked surprisingly, just as he expected.

"I just wanted to talk to you for a minute if that's okay," Andrew looked back at Brendan's car then looked Taina directly in her eyes. "What is he doing here?"

"Who? I don't know whose car that is."

"Come on Taina. If you're cheating on me with Brendan just tell me. Enough games. It would surprise me because he's my best friend but at this point, it doesn't matter. Just be honest with me. If you don't want to be in a relationship with me, that's all I need to hear and I will leave you alone."

"Andrew listen, now is not a good time to explain any of this. I haven't seen Brendan and I didn't even know that was his car. If you want, I can come over to your house and we can talk there."

Downstairs in the basement, Taina's brother was covering Brendan's mouth with his hand. Brendan was trying to listen for who was talking upstairs and could somewhat understand the conversation. He knew this was probably his only opportunity to get out of there, so he decided to bite Taina's brother's hand. When this happened, her brother screamed. Brendan yelled that he was trapped in the basement. Andrew heard the yelling and looked at Taina. They locked eyes before Andrew ran through the door knocking her over.

"Help! They got me captive down here, I'm not playing!" Brendan

screamed.

Taina's brother got up and punched Brendan in the face knocking the chair over. Andrew came running down the stairs. He saw the back of Taina's brother and Brendan tied in the chair on his back with a bloody nose. Taina's brother then turned around and looked at Andrew and ran at him knocking him over.

"Brendan? What are you doing here?" Andrew was trying to untie the ropes while constantly glancing over to Taina's brother who was trying to recuperate.

"Man I was making sure she wasn't cheating on you, but it turned into this! Get us out of here dude they're both crazy." Brendan moved his right arm back and forth until it was free then they were able to free the other one. "Kick him again!"

Andrew then kicked Taina's brother in the stomach again assuring that he stayed down. They began to run up the stairs to see Taina standing there blocking the door. She looked at the two of them and then smiled.

"I can't let you leave now that you know my secret. Why don't you both just sit down," she said calmly. She locked the front door still staring at the two and walked over to the table.

"I don't even know what's going on Taina! One minute I think you're cheating on me, the next my friend is tied up in your basement getting beat up by some dude!" Andrew yelled, he then glanced down at the table. "And why are there guns and pictures of government officials on the table?"

"Dude she's a spy, isn't it obvious," Brendan said. "It explains why she's good at fighting, the phone calls, and everything. So the good news is she wasn't cheating on you but the bad news is now she wants to kill us."

It was quiet for a couple of seconds after Brendan said that. Everyone just stood staring at each other or the table. Andrew then tapped Brendan on the shoulder and they both darted for the door. Taina jumped over the table chasing after them as Andrew fumbled with the locks trying to quickly unlock the door as Brendan pushed back at Taina. Taina then knocked Brendan over as Andrew got the door unlocked. Brendan grabbed her ankle as she tried to chase after Andrew making her fall. Brendan then got up quickly and the two ran for Andrew's car. Quickly unlocking it, they hopped in and locked the doors.

"Go, go, go dude! We got to call the cops!" Brendan searched for his phone, but he didn't have it on him. "My phone is in there still."

Andrew put his car in reverse quickly and threw his phone over to Brendan speeding off down the road.

"Make the call from my phone. We're headed to the police station right now." As they were driving, Andrew adjusted his back mirror to see Taina's car backing out of the driveway and then he sped up more. "Dude, I think they're following us."

As the phone rang Brendan turned around to see Taina and her brother speeding after them. The operator picked up the call and Brendan calmly stated the situation that was going on. Andrew began to speed up more getting closer to the inner city where there would be more traffic. Brendan described what car they were in and what car Taina and her brother were driving. As they drove eventually they heard police sirens and saw a police cruiser pull behind Taina's car, but they didn't stop driving. More police cars joined the chase and everyone was close to

the highway. Andrew was told to stay away from the highway trying not to put any civilians in risk of harm's way, so he decided to drive to the school.

"You better know what you're doing," Brendan said.

"Oh yeah, I've done this a thousand times," Andrew sarcastically responded. "Just trust me, if we get them to the school in the empty parking lot the police will be able to box them in, and then it will be over."

"And if that doesn't work?"

"Then I got a full tank of gas for her," Andrew stated as he sped up towards the exit for the school.

Arriving at the school, the chase came to an end with Andrew swerving into the parking lot, Taina crashed her car into a tree trying to follow the same pattern he did, and the police surrounded the two. Andrew and Brendan pulled off to the side as they watched the police close in on the car and pull Taina and her brother out of the car and put them in handcuffs. Taina gave one last look to Andrew and Andrew looked back. She put her head down in sadness and Andrew looked mellow once again. Brendan was stuffing tissue up his nose and kept sniffing then saw Andrew's expression and punched him in the arm.

"You're not the one with the bloody nose, don't look so down," he joked.

Andrew then smiled. He felt a little better. "Thanks for sticking by me man, this was crazy." He punched Brendan back.

"Yeah, next time I'll pick which girls we talk to. No more new girls!" Brendan stated.

The two laughed and then walked over to the police to talk to tell them everything that happened. They took them to the house and everyone found out that Taina and her brother were spies from Brazil sent to America to kidnap government officials that who would attend a meeting at an Arizona convention. Andrew and Brendan were later awarded for their bravery and help of arresting the spies. Then life went back to normal for the two friends, now known as local town heroes.

A Star and a Telescope

by Seamus Flanagan, '22

It's simple. I wake up. I go to school. I come home. I go to bed. Of course in between all that I eat, do homework, and study for tests, but at the end of the day that's it. This was, for a while, fine. But eventually I got bored and tired of being by myself. When high school came rolling around I decided to change that. I thought to myself: What do I need to do in order to make friends? Another question I had was how can I become popular? For one I needed to look attractive, which I already was. I had long hair with the sides and back shaved. I usually slicked my hair back with hair gel, but most of the time I left it alone. I'm around 5'10" and 150 pounds, so I am skinny but somewhat cut. I have a jawline that could cut diamonds and dimples that melt the hearts of all the people around me, but I never smile. Other than that I knew I needed to have a good personality to be popular. Since I kept mostly to myself until senior year of high school I had no idea how to act around others. So for the first few days at my new school, Reinhardt High, I talked to no one. I walked the endless halls seeing people in groups of three to five all talking together to making a jumbled mess of noise. Occasionally I would hear a single word like soccer, football, girls, the weekend. None of these topics were things I hadn't heard before but I wasn't a part of that world. I felt empty. I was a singular star in the night sky surrounded by thousands of other stars. I looked down at my feet as I walked just analyzing my steps and feeling the ground beneath me when I noticed another pair of feet in front of mine. I looked up and pushed my hair out of my eyes. He was about 5'7", blond hair, and relatively skinny. He wore a collared shirt that was tucked into his khaki shorts. He took a deep breath.

"Hello! Are you the new transfer student?" From this one interaction alone, I could tell exactly how this kid acted. So I just looked at him like I look at someone who tells a dad joke and let out a deep sigh. I did not want to interact with someone like him so I swerved around him and walked away. I could tell that people nearby were laughing underneath their breath.

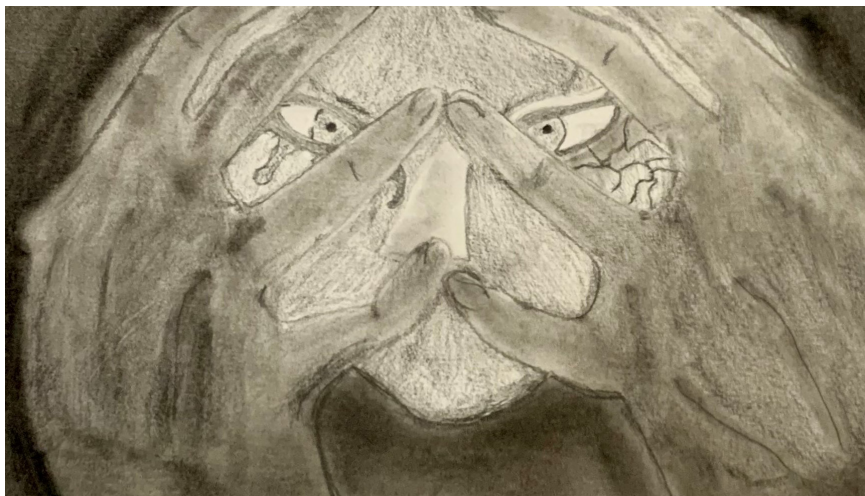
"Oh...okay then," he mumbled under his breath. I quickly walked away so as to not get scolded by a teacher on my first day for being late to class. As I turned the corner I was met by four kids looking at me like a peasant to a king. I hadn't said a word yet but I felt as if they were already judging me.

"Are you the new kid?" I turned to them expecting them to tell me I was a jerk or something. It was a group of four people: Two of them were girls and two of them were boys.

"Uh yeah," I said with a lack of expression. They all laughed hysterically.

"Dang, you really told that kid off!" he said. He was slightly taller than me with short brown hair that swooped to a middle part. He obviously played some kind of sport whether it was soccer, lacrosse or both.

"I bet that kids mom still breastfeeds him!" said the other guy. He was pretty short with a blond mullet. He was definitely a soccer player. You could tell because he gave off a vibe that he was cool, but you could tell he was really insecure.



artwrok by Senaid Ferhatbegovic, '22

"He is honestly the weirdest kid at our school," said one of the girls. She was pretty short with long blond hair. It was well kept. She was wearing some kind of potent perfume that smelled like Bath and Body Works.

"Yeah, what a loser," said the other girl. She was slightly taller than the blond haired girl. She had straight brunette hair that went down to her lower back. Her hair looked silky.

"Let me introduce ourselves. My name is Brent and this is Connor, Jamie, and Carissa. If you want to you should join us for lunch."

"Uh yeah for sure dude," I said a bit dumbfounded.

Brent dapped me up. They all followed him and disappeared into the mess of students roaming the halls. I stood in the hallway for a little while just watching the people walk right by me. All I could think of was one thing. Jackpot.

The loud chime of the lunch bell woke me from my sleep. A boom of students talking and getting out of their desks slowly disappeared down the hall. I got up out of my desk and opened my mouth letting out a loud yawn. I rubbed my eyes as I grabbed my lunch box and started heading for the door. I moved my hand away from my eye and there stood Connor is all his short glory.

"Hurry up dude I'm tryna cop us a seat at the lunch table," he said while swiftly moving to the lunch room. I followed closely behind him as we headed into the huge lunch room. The room was packed full of students with all different personality types. As we walked I could see the different friend groups: The jocks, the straight-A kids, goths, and other type of students. We kept walking past tables all around us all the while I could hear sections of people's conversations.

"So," Connor said as he looked back at me to make sure I was still following behind him. "Where'd ya come from?"

I cleared my throat. "Well I moved here from California because my dad got a new job. I know nothing about Illinois." He gave a bit of a chuckle.

"I've lived here all my life so me and the homies can show you around here." He stopped at a table and walked around and sat next to Brent. The table consisted of the four people I met in the hallway plus a couple of others that looked like wannabees.

"Have a seat," Brent said as he took a bite from his sandwich. I sat down and placed my lunch on the table and leaned back in my chair.

"I'm not gonna lie," Brent said mouth full of food. "That was some funny stuff you said earlier. I seriously can't get over it."

I honestly just did not want to deal with that kid because I was so tired but I decided to go along with it.

"Yeah, he seemed like a goody-goody type and I'm not tryna associate with him," I said with a smirk. "But did you see what he was wearing?" I laughed a bit. Jamie chimed in.

"He looks like he goes to a private school. Why is he tucking in his shirt?" she laughed

"Yeah who is he trying to impress? The principal?" Carissa said while choking on her laughter. I saw an opportunity to get them to like me so I took a deep breath.

"I bet that kid woke up and looked into his bathroom mirror and said I am so excited to meet the new kid and give him an epic tour of the school!" The whole lunch table exploded. There was an array of people smacking the table as well as people falling out of their chairs from laughter. Connor completely got out of his chair and ran away then ran back all the while dying from laughing. Brent finally started to compose himself.

"Oh my God, dude," he said wiping away a tear. "What's your name?" I coughed to try and clear my throat.

"My name is Xavier," I said.

Brent smiled. "That's a cool name man."



photo by Gonzo Avalos, '24

That day was the day my social status started to rise. People throughout the halls would react when they saw me. The jocks would dap me up, the cheerleaders would smile and push their hair over their ear, and others looked at me like they wanted to be me. Everyone around me idolized me. I started going to parties with Brent and his friends more often. I would always do something bombastic like get everyone to dance to some song or let someone five star me on my back. Each time I did something crazy, people would pull out their phones and record me. I felt like a celebrity. Everyone was watching what I did and anticipated what I would do next. I was the sun. No one could be me or look at me for too long or they would be blinded by my greatness. I was finally where I wanted to be. I don't know if it was luck or if it was me, but either way I was in it and I was doing something every single weekend.

I woke up feeling weighted. My eyes were heavy, my entire body was sluggish and fatigued. I stepped out of my bed and flipped the light switch practically blinding myself from the light of my room. I eventually got used to the light and went to my bathroom to take a shower. I got ready and started on my way to school. I felt groggy and gross. Today was the day I didn't want to deal with anybody. The car ride was a blur. I barely remembered the drive to school because I didn't think at all while driving. I pulled up to the usual spot that Brent and his friends parked. I got out of my car and rubbed my eyes, then saw Brent, Connor and a few other dudes hanging by Connor's car. Brent noticed me and called for me.

"Hey, Xavier, get over here," he shouted while waving his hand like he was helping a truck back up. I walked over while fixing my hair.

"What's up man?" I said while dapped him up.

"So, there's this new girl who is transferring from Wolfe Academy. I have no idea who she is but I've heard rumors that she's like weird." Wolfe Academy was our rival school, so when we got transfers from there it was just easy pickings for us to make fun of them.

"Got it," I said as I walked to my car to get my bag. Brent took a step forward to make sure I heard him.

"I don't know much about her but I do know that she's gonna be in your next class." I shot up my hand and gave a thumbs up. I grabbed my bag and headed into school while trying not to fall asleep. I went straight into my class to avoid any conversations with people. I got to my chemistry class, sat in my desk, and dropped my head on the desk and started to sleep. After about five minutes I heard a voice to the right of me.

"Uh, hello? Is this chem?" I was so tired I was glued to that desk so I did not look up.

"Mnhmm." I grunted with my raspy morning voice. I could hear her sit down in the desk next to mine.

"Okay thanks! What is your name?" Her voice was soft and cute. It was the type of voice that could calm anyone down with just a few words.

"Xavier," I mumbled with my head down. She laughed a bit.

"My name is Hannah. You seem tired," she said. Her laugh caught me so off guard it made my heart skip a beat. I quickly put my head up to see who this was and when I did, my face was met with this long dirty blond hair, big hazel eyes, and beautiful pink lips formed into a smile and dimples that could kill a man. It caught me so off guard how cute she was that I stared at her without saying a word for a couple of seconds.

"You okay?" she asked with a smile. I shook my head to wake myself

up.

"Yeah, yeah, just a bit tired is all," I said as I yawned. "I don't think I've seen you around here before. Did you just transfer or somthin?"

She nodded.

"Yeah I transferred from Wolfe Academy."

My heart stopped for a second. This is the girl that I have to be a jerk towards because she goes to our rival school? I cleared my throat.

"Ah I see," I looked down at my desk.

"Yeah," she sighed. "It has pretty hard to make new friends here because Wolfe Academy is your rival school and, of course, there has to be beef between the schools." She looked down at her desk for a few seconds then grabbed her chemistry book from her bag. I couldn't believe this was the girl I was supposed to be rude to just because of some stupid rival school rival drama. But how bad would it be to just eat lunch with her and see what she is like? I tapped my desk a couple of times then looked at her.

"Hey, would you like to sit at lunch with me and I could like, give ya the rundown of the school?" I choked on my words a bit. But she smiled at me.

"Yeah, I'd like that!" she said with so much positivity she could bloom flowers with just her voice alone.

"Big bets," I said then class started. Part of me was worried that Brent would get pissed at me for befriending her, but why does it matter? She is the nicest girl I had met in a while. We made jokes all during class to the point where the teacher had to tell us to stop being so noisy. Eventually the lunch bell rang and we started heading to lunch.

"Trust me this place sucks, but if you know who to talk to it can get you a long way," I said.

"I can very much tell. You know a lot of people here," she said with a smile. We eventually made it to lunch and I made sure to sit a long way away from where Brent and the group sit so they wouldn't get upset with me. Lunch went smoothly for a while. She would laugh at my jokes, listen to my stories, told me stories of her own that were interesting, and she, overall, was just a good listener. In the middle of a joke I started to tell, I got a text.

"Gimme a second," I said as I pulled out my phone. It was from Brent telling me to go to the bathroom. "Shoot."

"What's wrong?" Her smile when from a concerned look so quickly. I looked up.

"Oh, it's nothing. I just forgot to call my mom is all. I'll be right back," I got up and went to the bathroom and sat on the sink. I checked my phone to see if he texted me again and right as I did he walked into the bathroom.

"Hey dude, where were you?" he said somewhat sternly.

"Oh I was uh... taking a make-up test for um... geometry." I swallowed. He widened his eyes.

"Oh really?" He said as he crossed his arms. "Is that why Jamie said you were sitting with the exact girl I told you to avoid?"

"Well, yeah..." I said before he interrupted me.

"It's one thing to say 'hi' to her, but it's a completely different thing to sit with her at lunch."

"I was..." I had no idea what I was going to say. "I was going to..." He looked at me like I was a diseased rat eating a rotten sandwich. "I was trying to see what she was like so I could, um, find more things to

make fun of her with!" His face went back to normal and he uncrossed his arms.

"Aight man, whatever you say." He checked his phone. "I'm going back to lunch. There's a football game today and I want to see you there." He started to leave the bathroom.

"Okay man I'll come," I said quietly. I waited a couple of minutes to let him go back to his lunch table. In that moment, I didn't think. It felt as if I was on auto pilot watching me move out of the bathroom past all the jumbled noises of people speaking while going back to my lunch table. I was just wandering aimlessly until I saw her and I snapped back to reality. She looked concerned.

"Is everything okay?" she asked. I fixed my hair and turned to her.

"Yeah, no, I'm chillin' right now." I sat down and started to eat a bag of chips. We were silent for a few moments then she turned to me so quickly the scent of her hair wafted towards me.

"This might be too soon, but do you want to hang out or something today?" I spoke without even thinking.

"Yes." She smiled and her eyes looked like gemstones.

"Would you want to go to my old church? It has this big hill that has a great view of the stars. I could bring a blanket and we could just like vibe, ya know?" I started to brighten up.

"I would like that."

I realized that I actually needed to go to the bathroom. "Okay now I need to go to the bathroom."

She laughed.

"You forgot to go to the bathroom?" I turned around to look at her.

"I just get like that sometimes!" I laughed as well. For that small moment I thought the world was perfect. Nothing mattered to me in this moment. I stepped into the bathroom with a smile on my face as bright as the sun. But the second I realized where I was, my heart sank fast. I planned a date with Hannah the same day as the football game. I went to the sink and splashed cold water in my face.

"What am I going to do?" All of a sudden I heard a noise in the bathroom stall. I turned around quickly and realized that there was someone in the stall.

"Sorry man. Didn't mean to say that out loud." I went to the urinal to use it.

"What," said the kid from the stall. "What's up with you?" I did not know who this kid was at all but in this moment I just needed to talk to someone about this.

"Well..." I sighed. "I planned to hang out with my friends and also planned to hang out with this girl that I think is cool. I just don't know who to choose." The kid grabbed a piece of toilet paper.

"Who did you ask to hang first?" he asked.

"Technically, my friends but they are kinda jerks." I zipped up my pants and went to the sink to wash my hands.

"Well then hang out with who you think would be better for you. And I'm not saying better for what people think of you but more for what will make you happier as a person." I looked up from the sink and looked at myself in the mirror then at the stall he was in.

"You're right dude." I realized what I wanted. I turned to the stall with a bright smile.

"Hey dude what's your name?"

He was silent. I left the bathroom. I came back to the lunch table and

sat next to her.

"So, uh, where you wanna try and meet?" I said brightly. She smiled and looked at lunch and then back at me.

"I could probably have you meet at my house then we can walk to the church," she said. I held out my fist waiting for a fist bump.

"Sounds like a plan," I said. She looked at my hand then locked eyes with me. She bumped knuckles with me. In a weird way it just felt so right like when two puzzle pieces' clasp together. The lunch bell rang with an undertone of the conversations of the entire lunch room getting louder. I grabbed my backpack and flung it over my shoulder. I looked at her.

"I will see you later then," I said and started to head to my last class. I could hear her getting on her feet.

"Alright I'll see ya!" Even without looking at her, I could tell she was looking at me the whole way until I left the lunch room. I started heading down the hallway away from the lunch room slowly but surely reaching the left turn from the hallway and as I turned left I was met with Brent and his friends.

"So," he said loudly, "Were going to meet at Connor's house then go to the game together," I blinked twice and lowered my eyebrows.

"Can't. I'm busy." I started to walk past them when Brent moved right in front of me.

"You're not hanging out with that chick are you?" He crossed his arms. I looked at him and said nothing. "You've got to be kidding me! You are really going to hang out with that girl instead of us?" My heart sank and I widened my eyes.

"What did you just say?" I said deeply. He laughed.

"You heard me," His friends laughed behind him. I took a deep breath.

"You guys are the worst. It took me a while to realize that. You all are boring people. All you do every single day is rag on other people for just being themselves. You think that makes you cool? You think you're interesting people for talking bad about others? You choose not to like someone because of rivalry school drama. If you were to just talk to her ONCE you would realize that she is the nicest person you've ever met. And I'm not saying nice because of popularity or looks. She nice because she cares about other people," I shot up two middle fingers in their direction. "Forget you!"

Not a word was spoken after that. I did not realize but I had created a crowd because of how loud I was. Brent did not say a word. I backed up a bit to get a good look at his face. It's clear nobody had ever told him off before. He looked like a deer lost in the headlights. A boom of laughter came out through the entire hallway. I walked past him and pushed through the crowd to get to my last class.

I pressed my finger on the old white doorbell then took a step back waiting patiently. I checked my phone while waiting and saw the door crack open, so I put it back into my pocket and looked up. She looked amazing. It caught me so off guard.

"H-hello," I stuttered. She laughed and came outside to shut her front door.

"Hey, you ready to look at the stars?"

I smiled. "Of course."

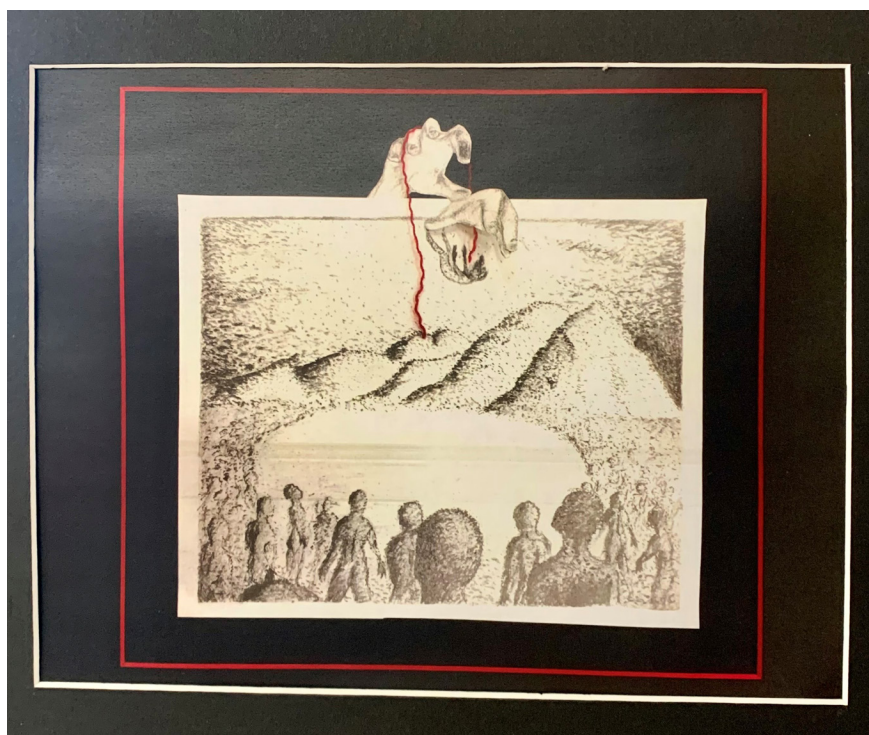


photo by Alex Lewis, '22

A Flipped Life

by Alexander Hornsey, '22

When I was young, my mother died. I was eight then. For eight years, I held it very closely. The day my mother died. I saw it all. I'm old now, I've gotten over it. It was like a broken record, repeating in my mind. I felt alone most of the time. My brother went with his biological father, and I went to my own. My name is Aidan Oldvance, and I wish to tell you the story of when my life was flipped.

That one day, I got out of bed and grudgingly got ready for school. Every day felt the same, just another copy. You get up, go to school, go home, do homework, then go to sleep. That's how I always saw it, at least. I lived with the thought, "Maybe one day, it'll all be better."

My mother gave me this metal watch that I had been using since seven days before her death. I've taken good care of it, and I still have it. I always remembered it having more detail in years prior to that time. But, it was just simple lines at twelve, three, six, and nine, and the three arms. I don't use that watch anymore; I've advanced to these "modern technologies."

My father never talked to me. I guess I was neglected. Maybe not. But, he took me to school, took me home, and cared for me, to some degree. I later found in life he was just busy, and I was left with a lot of time to think. I spent much of that time thinking about how I could get out of what I was in.

I went to school. There was a new transfer. The teacher reluctantly said, "We have a new transfer today. Mr. Revelitav, would you like to introduce yourself?"

He stood up and said "I'm John Revelitav, I don't have anything else I wish to say." His seat was next to mine. The person who originally sat there transferred out of the school as well three days prior. Not sure if it's allowed for a transfer at that time of the year, but I guess it might be some form of a coincidence.

The teacher resumed class.

"Psst, you alright?" John whispered to me.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I said back, "Just didn't have a great start this morning."

"Ah, yeah, I get it. Sometimes days aren't the way we want 'em to be. We fight through it anyways."

The teacher looked at us. "Stop talking or I'll send you to the principal!" she screams. She's never really handled people whispering well. I looked at my watch, and with its little detail, I could tell only 10 minutes had passed. We go on with class. John confronted me after school.

"Are you sure you're alright? You don't seem like you are one hundred percent."

"Yes, I'm fine, why are you so concerned?"

"Just gotta make sure everyone's alright, y'know? You're the only person in the class that seems like something's up." I didn't think I seemed off.

"We just barely met in a classroom, why are you trying to be so pushy?"

"A few things happened in the past that I don't want repeated. If you don't want to talk about it, I won't continue."

"I don't. Buzz off."

A week later, I wondered if I should talk to John or let some things go as I was bottling everything up. I hadn't told anyone any of the things I experienced, I always remembered people ignoring my problems I told them about and saying I should walk it off. To be frank, I got tired of living like that, I want things to change. He seemed like he might be able to help.

Class time rolled around. He wasn't there. I hoped he wasn't sick. I wanted to get this over with. Where is he? What happened to him? Maybe he's just late? I look at my watch, only five minutes in. Ten minutes in, he comes in late.

"Why are you late to class, Mr. Revelitov?" said the teacher, visibly annoyed.

"Carpool got sick, so I had to find someone else to drive," John replied.

"That's great, now go sit down. You're tardy."

John went to his desk.

I looked towards him and whispered, "Hey, after school can we ta—"

"Stop talking!" the teacher screams.

John only looked at me and nodded. He probably didn't want us to get into more trouble with the teacher.

After school, I went to John, and he took me to a nearby abandoned water plant. I looked at my watch, three-thirty. My dad didn't care if I got home late, as long as I got home before dinner. I also had to walk home. At the water plant, things seemed like they were becoming vibrant. Nature was breaking up the concrete that was once perfectly there, the vines growing on the walls. How nature can persevere in the worst of circumstances. It always reminded me of these tales of nuclear disasters, and how soon after, nature would take over, and you would still only see some remnants of human construction. I would always remember this period in my life.

"So, what's up?" John asked me, while going sitting down on a concrete block.

I sit down on the concrete block across from him. "You know, my mother died, and I've never been able to deal with it, I just feel... worthless. Like I have nowhere to go, I feel like shit, constantly."

"I get it, I get it. The problem is, you haven't gotten over it. I had a friend about two years ago. He killed himself. Abusive parents. I couldn't get over it for months, man. I sat there, wishing I could have been able to do more, help him out more. I don't want this to happen again. I had to figure out the hard way that it's something I can't change anymore. Do I regret not doing more? Of course. But I can't go back in time, I have to



photo by Alexander Hornsey, '22

keep moving forward. And so, sometimes you have to find something to help deal with it.”

“So you’re just telling me to just ‘get over it?’”

“Yeah. Do you want to continuously be stuck in that era? You’ll end up screwing yourself over so hard if you don’t. You’re still in a save-able state.”

“So what should I do to just ‘get over it?’”

“What do you like? Anything you enjoy?”

“What?”

“Answer the question.”

“I suppose I like drawing things.”

“How often do you do it?”

“Not often.”

“Try doing it more often, see where that goes.”

“Why, what does this even have to do with anything I said before?”

“Sometimes a ‘coping mechanism’ helps, put your mind off of it. Find something else to occupy your mind. Plus, you could refine a craft. Might make some money off of it, too. But anyways, I think I’ve got something for you to do. Follow me.”

I followed him and he took me to a river. The way there was vibrant, filled with flowers, trees, and other plant life. You could still see some of the concrete pathing that was broken up over time. He told me to stay at that river and think about things, reflect, even. I sat there for an hour, just thinking. I look at my watch, roughly four forty-five, and I notice it has more detail. There’s now eight more notches. And after that, I went home.

I spent most of that weekend drawing. I wasn't good at it, not much at all, but I was improving very slowly. On that Saturday, my brother came in and tore up all of my drawings. Every Saturday, his dad would have him over, so we wouldn't be completely separated from each other. He was my brother, after all, but he was a total annoyance in his young years. He would always take my stuff and either destroy it or damage it. One time he took one of my figures and completely snapped it in half when he threw it at a wall. It wasn't about the age difference; he just wanted to be that kind of "rebellious" kid as he was still twelve. He was the kind of kid annoyed his brother solely because he hated his brother.

I went to school the next day, and John was already there. That day felt different, things looked clearer. I noticed my watch had a digital month and day display, which was definitely odd for this type of watch. "You do any drawing?" John said to me, as if he already knew the answer.

"Yeah. Was pretty relaxing, I guess. Brother came over and ripped them all up, though."

"What a jerk."

"Yeah."

"You ever do one of the good ol' one-twos on him? Teach him a bit of a lesson?" John had said, jokingly.

"Nah, I'm not the person to do that. Wish I was though."

"Well, at least you're doin' better than last week. That's a start, and a plus."

"Yeah, I suppose so."

The classroom was a bit more vibrant than what I remembered days prior. The details in my life were clearing up, I could see more. That day was definitely different, more "defined" as I was able to recognize the name of my school for the first time in ages. "Cloudy Day High School,"



photo by Alexander Hornsey, '22

was pretty ironic. But, the classroom was bland and washed out colors.

There typically never was anything hung up, just the tan walls and the chalk board, except for one poster that said, "Deadlines are closer than you think."

The teacher, Mrs. Beckle, wasn't too "inspiring" of a person from what I recall, the type that probably lives a boring life. It was represented well with her class, as probably the classes she taught was the most boring type of class imaginable. I remember that around this time I saw her for herself. She was relatively short, but had dark, black hair, and a kind of attitude you don't like to see.

After school that day, John and I went back to that abandoned water plant, mostly just to mess around. We were walking around and seeing what's there. Abandoned places always served as a point of interest for me, as just the idea of walking around something no one has seen for months, even years, is interesting to me, and how those structures were handled. We found a computer system, some exposed wiring on it, but pretty in-tact other than a few meters that the glass was broken. Eventually, he brought it up. "Sorry to break the theme here, but uh, how did your mother die?" John asked with visible concern.

"How did my mom die? She got lung cancer from being an excessive smoker. Things only got worse from there. Her lungs were already screwed, and then she got pneumonia while having cancer, and it caused her to nearly suffocate her to death. She asked for the needle."

"Oh, wow," he said uncomfortably, "that's... a very rough way to die."

"Yeah. At that point, I would have asked for the same thing, too."

"I would bet no one would want to go through that."

"Yeah, I couldn't really imagine it."

"Same here, I guess. Actually, since we're on the topic, uh, as kind of strange of a question this is, but why did your friend do... you know what?"

"I'm not sure if I want to say."

"Alright, I guess. I just thought you would want to let that out."

"I know. I already did."

The rest of that night was awkward. I didn't have a car, but John was able to take me home in his. Once again, I noticed my watch had more detail, another dial, but that one I couldn't figure out exactly what it was, there was no words on it. The closest thing I could think it was had been a second counter, as the seconds lined up, but there were one-hundred-twenty notches on it. When I got home, I found out my brother was staying with me for a week. I later found out his dad got in some legal troubles and my brother had to stay with me until that blew over. He was homeschooled by his dad, so he pretty much got a free week off from school. Luckily, he had a different room than me, but I knew it wouldn't be sunshine and rainbows for long. One day I came home and an argument broke out over my room.

"What the heck, Liam? Why did you tear up my room?"

"Because."

"Stop going into my room and tearing up all of my stuff! How would you like it if I went in here and broke all your Spiderman toys, huh?"

"Then I'd rip up more of your stupid drawings!"

"Yeah, well at least I'm doing stuff that is somewhat productive with

my time, unlike you!"

"Yeah, well go away before I tell Dad what you said to me!"

"Fine then, I don't care anymore about your garbage. Just don't touch my room again!"

He stopped until two days later. He then tore up my room again and a similar argument happened. Except that time I told my dad that my brother tore up my stuff twice, and my brother got in trouble for the first time in ages. I guess Liam never really got scolded for his actions when he was twelve, but he learned to improve by the time he got to college.

That week I had to live with my brother, I was able to hide some drawings under my room's carpet. I found out that I could do that when I did a test run, so I hid all of the other ones under that rug making sure nothing could be seen. I was able to keep some of those drawings utilizing that. I had a drawing of a dragon, similar to something you'd see on old Chinese interpretations of dragons, and also a nineteen-sixty-seven Ford Mustang, for instance. The Mustang was still poor, as it was one of my earliest, and the dragon was pretty decent by my standard.

Over time, John and I became fairly close friends. Even though we mostly went to that abandoned water plant, we were like best friends. I took him to my room once in a while to show him the drawings I made. He was impressed. He would always say he would never be able to draw the same as me, but I suppose that's one of those things where that's just the common reply to that. Though, I started to draw probably way too much. John started to critique it.

"Hey, Aidan, you know you're probably doing this too much, right?"

"Why's that?"

"I only ever see you drawing, it's like it's starting to be an addiction rather than something to help you along."

"What are you even talking about?"

"Look at yourself, man. You're drawing all the time. Like I said, it's starting to look like an addiction. You don't want to be like one of the flunks in the class, right?"

"What do you mean 'flunks of the class?'"

"Those kids that sit in the back of the room doing nothing related to the class, end up failing the class."

"Why do you think I'd ever turn into one of them?"

"Once again, look at yourself. Listen to what I'm saying. You're drawing all the time, it's getting concerning."

"I'm not going to turn into one of them."

"Sure, whatever. But I'm pointing this out before it gets worse."

"Whatever you say."

Later that week, I looked in the mirror. Probably for the first time in ages. I noticed the scar I had, which I got from an incident from I didn't even remember, and I noticed a beard starting to grow. I guess I really did have the genetics of my dad.

My dad had become clearer over this time, too. I started to notice him around the house more. I could have just been crazy, or my eyes were really opening up for once. He was in his later forty's, and already



photo by Alexander Hornsey, '22

was dealing with arthritis, and had this large beard you'd see a trucker have. He had two scars on his face, and both were caused by a car crash that happened many years ago.

I noticed that I had longer hair than I remembered, my face was somewhat defined in features. However, I still had the young look that any sixteen-year-old has. But, I felt most, that John was wrong about the drawing addiction. It would be a long time that I would find out that he was right.

John had been growing more and more distant as time went on. John still talked to me, but not as often. Over time it kept getting worse and worse. Every day after, I kept looking in the mirror. Every day, I kept convincing him he was wrong. Human error. I kept going on, though. I made many more drawings, varying in quality. These were the life blood of me at the time, nothing reigned over it.

My watch was increasingly losing detail, but at a slow rate. Over weeks, things that were originally there started fading away. I never understood what it meant until much later in my life.

Over this time, I still kept bugging myself over and over about John. It was an attack on what I loved and what he made me do to deal with my mother's death. I had been attacked.

I went to school one day, and the teacher seemed off. She seemed like she didn't care about what happened. A massive fight. Two students kept hitting each other until their teeth were falling out, until the principal walked in. No one ever figured out exactly what caused it. Some said it was two friends that had gotten some distaste over each other for not paying attention to each other. Per stereotypical high school style, a huge crowd cheered them on. But the teacher, she just stared. Didn't attempt to stop it. Just watched as it happened. Not a word. During class, she

didn't do anything. She just gave us a study hall and just stared at her computer. She didn't do anything with it, she just stared.

John's attendance started becoming more and more random. Some days, he'd show up, others, he wouldn't. And it seemed like it was a lottery. My brother hadn't been brought over to my house in a few weeks. I wondered what was going on, and why things were different again. I thought, maybe it was just a bad month.

I tried to talk to John after a few weeks, and it seemed as though he didn't want to talk to me. I slowed down the drawing, started paying attention in class more, and did everything I knew I could have been possibly doing different. He only would talk to me for a little bit and leave some questions unanswered. During group work, he wouldn't even talk to me at times. I would ask if there's something going on with his life that I should try and help him about, and I typically never got a response.

It seemed like I was John's only friend, too. He was a later transfer and probably didn't have the ability to make many friends because he was one of those later people that no one took the time to figure out. Everything was already set in stone, and trying to break off of that might have been problematic in the past. Eventually, one day, it broke.

"Why do you keep pestering me?" John said, very much angered.

"I'm concerned for you, man. You're acting odd."

"And you were the one so clouded in your mind to do nothing but drawing."

"What are you going on about?"

"I'd see you do nothing but drawing, drawing, drawing. You're addicted to it, admit it."

"I haven't even done much in the past few weeks!"

"Yeah, well you haven't even considered trying to talk to me."

"I've been trying to talk to you for the past week! You barely even talk to me."

"What are you even talking about? You haven't talked to me once other than that one group project."

"Yes I have, I've been trying to figure out what's going on with your life since you started acting up. What is up with you?"

"Nothing. Stop asking about it."

"You're about as readable as a book, stop trying to hide it. You very obviously have something going on in your life."

"What's it to you?"

"You're one of my best friends, man. I have every right to be concerned about you."

"No, screw off."

"Is it about your friend? What is this about?"

"NO! It's about how I keep having friends that drive themselves to points they screw themselves over! And you're one of them!"

"I've been following every piece of your advice since we met. You tell me you want me to find a coping mechanism, I found it. You tell me to dial it back, I dial it back. And yet, you haven't been able to decide what you want me to do."

"You already screwed yourself over, and you just don't realize it yet."

"How did I screw myself over? Huh?"

"You'll find out soon enough."

From there, John walked away. He was never seen again. After a week, I went to the principal, asking what happened to a “John Revelitav,” and the principal just responded with a confused face. I eventually went to the police, and they found a Revelitav family, however, they were in a completely different state, on the other side of the country, and no John Revelitav existed.

The watch I had simplified itself back down to the main notches it has to this date. I never understood why it simplified down, and had more things to it, for it to fade away. To this day, I have had no understanding of what happened. My life was changed, no doubt about it. It always confused me how at a few hours, a person I once knew and was good friends with, had vanished, with no trace.



photo by Alexander Hornsey, '22

Rick Bam

by Alexander Frank, '22

Swerving wildly into the open parking lot of Frank's Car Dealership, located in Boulder, Colorado in his GT 500 Mustang Rick Bam parked his car and yawned loudly. Frank's Dealership sells high-end cars such as Maseratis, Audis, Land Rovers and Corvettes, and Rick was an expert at selling them. Still blasting his music at max volume from his car speakers, the 28-year-old 5'11" man stepped out of his car. He looked around wearing his Ray Ban shades, his gray collared work shirt, khaki pants and dress shoes and smiled. He ran his fingers through his short blond hair then crushed the Red Bull energy drink he had drunk on the way to work with his big hands and threw it into the trash can.

"Another day to make some big money." Rick said aggressively as he walked through the doors of the dealership.

It was around seven in the morning and the workers of Frank's Car Dealership are supposed to arrive by six thirty. Rick, of course, was thirty minutes late. Rick's co-workers all looked up to see Rick as he walked in and looked right back at their papers on their desks, rolling their eyes or sighing. Rick's boss, Thomas Verges, walked up to Rick with a file of papers and put them out in front of Rick stopping him from walking.

"What's this boss?" Rick asked, grabbing the papers, skimming through them, then looking confused.

"Well if you were at the meeting this morning you would know that we got a new shipment of cars coming in today," Thomas said annoyed. He folded his arms and cocked his head to the right. "This is the fourth meeting you have missed this year, when are you going to get your act together?"

"My act is together boss. I just think it's a little unnecessary that we have to arrive here at SIX THIRTY in the morning, you know what I mean?" he said jokingly slapping Thomas in the arm with the file of papers.

"Just get to your desk and go over the cars we are getting shipped in today, I'm pairing you up with Jerry to make sure they are all in top condition once they get off the truck." Thomas instructed as he walked away shaking his head.

Jerry is Rick's rival at work, they disagree on everything from how to sell cars to the customers, who is better at selling cars between the two of them, to sports, how they live their lives outside of work and he likes to bring up how Jerry doesn't get as much respect as he does. Naturally, Rick laughed as he walked to his desk thinking it was a joke, but when Jerry was already sitting in his chair legs kicked up on his desk looking at his watch, Rick was angered.

"Dude, what are you doing? Get your legs off my desk, man," Rick yelled as he slapped Jerry's legs off of his desk. "I thought boss was kidding when he said we're working together on this assignment. Apparently he thinks you need to learn a thing or two about car shipments."

"Oh it's not me he's worried about," Jerry said looking up from his watch smiling. "Just wanted to note that you're about thirty-six minutes late. That's almost close to your record of forty-five minutes."

"Yeah? Whatever. Get out of my chair. I have to see when these cars are coming in," Rick ordered. Once Jerry got up, he swung into his swivel chair and spun around to the keyboard logging into his computer. "Boss never tells us when these new cars are coming in. Isn't that crazy?"

"If you would've read the papers he gave us you would've seen that they come in at eight-fifteen," Jerry said standing over him. Jerry is much smaller than Rick. He is 5 foot 7, skinny and wears glasses with long hair. Rick likes to call him a "hippie" because of the long hair as a joke.

"Well I'm going to go out for a smoke. You already got me worked up," Rick replied. He stood in front of Jerry then pumped his arms making Jerry flinch then walked outside laughing.

The truck was five minutes late, pulling into the back of the store. Rick was real excited because his favorite cars were on the shipment, Corvettes. Jerry and Rick walked up to the truck driver and made sure all cars didn't have any damage on them.

"Look at these beautiful cars. I sell these more than any other employee here," Rick bragged as he rubbed his hand on one of the doors of the Corvette. "You know what's the key to selling them Jerry?"

"No, what's the key to selling these?" Jerry asked.

"Confidence! You got to look that customer in the eyes and say, 'You want this car. You need this car. The car loves you and you love the car.' And then you got them hooked. It's that simple!"

"Yeah right. That's a bunch of bull. I'd love to hear you sell a Corvette to someone talking like that," Jerry said, crossing his arms. "If you can I will give you three hundred dollars."

Rick looked over to the truck driver that was parking some of the Corvettes in the lot. He grinned and looked back at Jerry, cracked his knuckles and danced over to the truck driver. Jerry followed behind Rick slowly watching him dance with confidence. Once they got over to the truck driver who was still sitting in the silver Corvette, Rick knocked on the window scaring the driver. The truck driver let the window down slowly.



photo by Alexander Frank, '22

"Nice car isn't it?" Rick confidently asked.

"It sure is," the truck driver replied. He parked the car, let the window up, then hopped out looking at the car slowly. "These are my favorite cars to transport. So smooth and I always drive extra careful with these babies."

"I bet you would drive extra careful if you had one of your own too. Take it on the nice smooth road. Go up to the mountains to look at the view. Bring your lady with you. It's a perfect two seater for all of that. The car fits you too. Nice-sized guy like you. This car was built for you." Rick patted him on the shoulder boosting the truck driver's confidence. "What's your name sir?"

"Davis," he replied smiling. They shook hands. Davis couldn't stop looking at Corvette.

"Davis, I'm Rick. Rick Bam. Want to take it on a test drive?"

"Aw, I don't know Mr. Bam. I got a schedule I'm on and I got another shipment to move in." Davis said shaking his head. "I would love to, though."

"Listen Davis, everyone needs a break from their job. I know driving them big trucks are stressful. I tell you what, let's hit the road in it for ten minutes and see how you like it. I'm going to go grab the keys for it and you just wait right here," Rick said as he walked away, not giving Davis a chance to reply.

Jerry chased after Rick. "Hey! Hey! Rick that guy might be late for his next delivery and unlike you I'm pretty sure he would like to be on time for his job."

"Aw, Jerry shut up and let me do my job. You're just mad that I'm about to sell this car." Rick dismissed Jerry, grabbed the keys, and walked back outside. "Just admit that you are not a better car salesman than me."

Jerry shook his head and followed Rick. When they got to the car, Rick tossed the keys to Davis from a distance, and they hopped in. Jerry stood outside folding his arms. Rick showed Davis all the features of the car, gave him a rundown of the route they would take so Davis would be back in plenty of time for his next delivery, and then told Davis to turn the car on. Davis put the key in the ignition and started the car looking over at Rick who had a big smile on his face.

"Rev the engine, man!" Rick yelled hitting Davis in the arm.

Davis began to rev the engine. a small smile came across his face as he did so and kept revving it while Rick hyped him up yelling and whooping loudly. Jerry walked away from the car as the foolishness continued and eventually turned around to see Davis and Rick pull out of the parking space screeching the tires loudly and driving swiftly to the entrance. The commotion caused Thomas to come running out of the dealership up to Jerry.

"Jerry what is going on out here? Where is Rick?"

"He went to go test drive one of the new Corvettes with the truck driver. What's new boss?" Jerry said as he casually walked past Thomas into the dealership.

Davis drove the Corvette down the main road slowly. Rick watched as cars passed by them and would open his mouth up wide and throw his arms in the air for each one that passed. Davis laughed a little each time.

"Okay dude, I've had enough! There's no music on, you are driving the speed limit letting people in a Prius pass us up, and you just sit there smiling!" Rick yelled. "I'm hooking up the AUX, we are about to hit the dash. Exit on to the highway!"

"But Mr. Bam, we planned that the route would avoid the highway so I would get back in time. I don't have that much time left to test drive this car." Davis said.

"Then you better drive fast to the next exit!"

Davis merged over to the exit on the highway. The exit was a long ramp down and there was barely any traffic in the morning. Rick was pumped to see how Davis would test the 0 to 60 miles per hour in the Corvette. As they went down the exit, Davis progressively sped up. Rick pumped his fist in the air chanting as Davis regained his confidence as they got on to the highway. When Davis merged on to the highway he was already going 80 miles per hour zooming into the far left lane and speeding past the few cars that were on the road. They both began to laugh as they drove past all the

cars and Davis relaxed his body as he drove.

"See it's not that bad is it?" Rick asked. "Don't you just love the feeling of the open road? Gliding past all the cars, going the speed you want to go, in a nice fancy car like this!"

"You're right Rick! This is incredible!" Davis yelled as he progressively sped up, now hitting 95 miles per hour.

The two were so distracted, they didn't know their speed. Rick forgot to mention that the exit they needed to take was coming up. Looking up at the signs, Rick slapped Davis on the shoulder then pointed to the exit ramp that was right in front of them. Davis swerved over trying to slow down, but the Corvette maintained its speed. The exit was a ramp leading up to a bridge with a traffic light at the top. The light was red and there were five cars sitting at the light. Rick frantically tried to get Davis to turn to the right, but it was too late. They slammed into the car in front of them sending Rick flying out of the side window. The airbags deployed hitting Davis in the face knocking him out. The car that they hit slammed into the truck in front of it not moving it at all somehow and the truck driver hopped out of his truck to help out.

Rick lay on the side of the road, his face covered in blood and broken glass, looking up at the sky and barely moving. The Frank's Dealership shirt Rick was wearing was torn in the front, his shoes were not on his feet, and his pants had a rip down the side. He groaned in pain trying to keep his eyes open and all he could think about was the damage that the Corvette was in. His right arm was broken. He couldn't tell if his back was broken or not but he couldn't feel it nor move it. The truck driver pulled Davis out of the car then ran over to Rick standing over him.

"Sir! Can you hear me sir?" the truck driver asked. "Help is on the way!"

Rick saw the truck driver standing over him on the phone but he slowly turned into a black silhouette as his vision was fading. He began to close his eyes trying to ask the truck driver how badly was the Corvette damaged but he couldn't get the words out. He closed his eyes and just thought "What a day, Rick. What a day."

At Saint Joseph Hospital located in Denver, Colorado, Thomas walked down the long hallway on the third floor to room 318. It had been five days since the crash and he softly knocked on the door of the room before entering. The room was dark but sitting upright in the hospital bed was Davis, watching some TV. He had stitches over his right eye, and he was wearing sunglasses from the concussion he received from the crash. Davis looked over to see Thomas and turned off the TV.

"Hey Mr. Verges," Davis said. "You know you don't have to check on me every day."

"I know, but I am responsible for what happened. I didn't know Rick was going to let you test a drive a car. If I would've known, I wouldn't have allowed it. You both could have been killed," Thomas explained. "Your lawyer is also going to be coming up in a few hours. Thought you should know that."

"Thanks. How's Rick?"

Thomas paused, looking at the ground. "He's changed," he finally said. "I can just tell he has changed. He barely talks, doesn't eat much, and never listens to music. I don't know if something happened to his brain during the crash or what, but the doctors are going to take another look to determine what's going on."

"That's good, I hope he gets better. In all honesty Mr. Verges, I really like him. He's a good car salesman and the crash was partially my fault. I was the one who chose to drive so fast. Rick just gave me the confidence in myself that I have never found before," Davis explained.

"Yes, but we both know how Rick is. We know how bad of an influence he is. He acts like he is still in college 24/7. Blasting his music, talking ignorantly and arrogantly to me every day, speeding when he drives, encouraging others to speed when they drive, picking on other co-workers and not regretting any of it cause that's how he is." Thomas balled up his fist as he said this. "I would've never wished any of this on him, but he needs to mature and maybe this is how."

"I would've bought the car if we didn't crash."

Thomas grinned. "Get some rest, I'll come back when your lawyer gets here." He slowly closed the door behind him, walking to elevator to go the fourth floor to check up on Rick. It felt like a long ride up when Thomas was on the elevator. He was alone and thought of the many things he wanted to say to Rick when he walked in the room, wanting to burst out in anger or be kind and patient, but he collected himself as the doors opened. Once again he walked down another hallway to room 425 opening the door slowly. Rick's right arm was in a sling. His face stitched and cut up and his back had three pillows behind him but it wasn't broken. He slowly turned his head as Thomas entered the room.

"Hey, boss," he said softly.

"Hello, Rick, how are you doing this morning?" Thomas asked as he closed the door behind him.

"Feeling a little better. My back is what hurts the most so far." Rick thought for a second then asked, "How's Davis doing?"

"He's doing fine so far, thanks for asking." Thomas was surprised by the question. It changed his whole mood from what he was feeling on the elevator. "His lawyer's coming up today to talk to him for a short time Rick, that means we need to talk about your job."

"I understand. It was my fault, I pushed him to drive faster, I was so distracted by having a good time. I didn't realize the exit I wanted him to take was right in front of us. I shouldn't have told him to take the exit. No, I shouldn't have told him to drive so fast." Rick then looked down at his arm. "Better yet, I shouldn't have even told him to test drive the car."

"You're right Rick, you shouldn't have. You're one of our best car salesmen, but I think we'll have to let you go. There's so much going on right now Rick and I came here to check up on you and tell you that. I'm sorry." Thomas felt some remorse which he was surprised to feel as he told Rick that he wouldn't be working for them anymore. It felt to him as a part of the business or a part of him was going away.

"I understand, I brought this upon myself and you have to do what's best for the company right now." Small tears began to fill Rick's eyes but he wiped them away with his left hand and stuck his head up. "It's been a pleasure and enjoyment working for you Mr. Verges, and I had a great time at Frank's Dealership. I do want to apologize for my behavior for the last years. I also want to apologize for just now realizing that I was a fool. I hope you can accept my apology and if not, I understand that too."

Thomas stood there watching Rick, he had never seen him cry. He thought the day he would fire Rick it would have been chaotic and destructive. Rick would have done donuts in his Mustang in the parking lot of the dealership, the police would have been called and Rick would have cussed him out, but that didn't happen. Rick laid there sniffing his nose trying to hold back some tears and didn't once make eye contact with him.

"Rick, you're going to do good in life. You have a personality that I haven't seen in someone for a long time. You are one of our best car salesmen and when you are determined to sell something, you get it sold. You'll get past this. You are maturing from this and learning. You're a good man, Rick. A really good man and I hope you'll realize that," Thomas encouraged. He leaned forward and put his hand on Rick's left shoulder and that was finally when they made eye contact with each other. "I'm going to keep checking up on you Rick, even when you get out the hospital. You sure did give me a hard time at the dealership, but deep down I knew you were my best employee."

"Thanks Mr. Verges. It really does mean a lot hearing that from you," Rick smiled. He hadn't smiled like that in a while - since his college graduation in fact. It was a real genuine smile.

Thomas softly patted his shoulder. "Well I got to get going. Can't stay away from the dealership for too long now. I'll see you later on Rick. Get you some rest." Thomas slowly walked away but then stopped as he was opening the door. "Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you, Davis would've bought the car if you would've made it back. Just thought you should know." He smiled then walked out the room.

Rick laid in his room smiling to himself, having full confidence once again but this time it was a different type of confidence. His ego wasn't in the way anymore, he didn't feel that immaturity to lash out and brag about his accomplishments, how he was better than every employee. Instead he just smiled and kept to himself. The next

thing on his mind was to get out and talk to Davis, then figure out the next new steps in his life. He looked out the window at the mountains in the distance and the bright blue sky thinking of all the job opportunities out there and the new way he would approach them.

“Soon there’s going to be another day to make some big money,” Rick said confidently.



Alex

by Max Baumgartner, '22

"Ok, can I ask why?" Alex said with a noticeable lack of inflection.

"I just can't, I'm doing this for you, this is bad for us," Jim said.

Alex gazed into his eyes with a stare of confusion and disappointment. Jim turned his head, walked upstairs, out to his car, and drove home. Alex looked around the room for a few minutes while she sat on her hands maintaining the same facial expression. She whispered to herself with a serene, "all right then," as she grabbed her Iron Maiden board and headed outside. It was a dark night in June as Alex walked to the asphalt parking lot that belonged to the neighborhood pool that was connected to her backyard. She put in her red Panasonic headphones that she picked up for \$10 at the gas station and drilled the basics. She hit one trick at a time repeatedly for 10 minutes each: ollies first, then shuvs, pop-shuvs, frontside 180, then backside, kickflips, heelflips, and varials. That was just the warm-up, she began working on new tricks, mostly ones that her idol Rodney Mullen had invented. She decided to go for a trick that she had never gathered the courage to attempt prior to the very moment. A tre flip into a dark slide was a risky move, even for the pros. There was a handrail at the entrance of the neighborhood pool on the side of the parking lot with chipped paint and in need of a serious waxing, but Alex had run dry on wax. She went for it anyway. She hit the tre flip into dark catch just fine, but it was when the grip tape hit the rusty handrail that she felt the face of her board catch on the tape. Her ankles collapsed over the trucks and she jammed the side of her head into the handrail and her shin scraped the rocky pavement, ripping through her baggy khaki pants and exposing her now bloody skin. Her eyes began to water.

"That was a really dumb idea," Alex said to herself under her breath, holding back her natural reaction to such an intense hit.

She began walking back to the house as she pulled out her phone take a look in the mirror at the hit that she had just taken to the face from the handrail. She hardly recognized herself. What she saw was a blonde girl in slightly smeared makeup with a mastodon t-shirt over a baggy, black, long sleeve tee and a huge bump with a large gash on the side of it the resided on her eyebrow. It was dripping blood that spread onto her earring of a fallen angel on a chain.

"Arrghh!" she exclaimed in disgust at the sight of her now disproportionate face. "I look like a bridge troll"

She went back inside, washed off her leg, put some alcohol on her openly wounded brow, and sat down behind her emerald green drum kit. She picked up her Vic Firth 5A sticks and began working on the B-side of Led Zeppelin II on her uncle Jonathan's turntable. Her uncle turned her on to drums and skating. He was her role model and best friend before he tragically passed just months before from alcohol poisoning after his divorce. She let herself calm down by playing along to the grooves of John Bonham before she had to get in bed for school the next day.

The next morning, she met up with her friends, Mackenzie and Ellie before school in the parking lot as she did every day. Mackenzie was



photo by Max Baumgartner, '22

a brunette, skinny girl who was about 5 feet tall and wore more makeup than belonged near anyone's face. She was a pretty girl, not quite as pretty as Alex, but she was very popular at school and maintained a good reputation with the basketball team which helped with her social status. Ellie was much more introverted. She wasn't one to drop jaws like her other two friends but she still was caught up in her popular high school persona. Alex got into Ellie's car as Ellie and Mackenzie were making conversation about some guy named Todd from English that they were very interested in for what must have been the thirtieth day in a row. Alex simply sat silently as they talked about the subject she had already heard so many times before. Eventually, she finally spoke in an explosion of irate frustration.

"Will you two ever shut up about Todd?!" Alex asked, "I'm so tired of hearing the same thing every day from you two, get over it!"

Ellie stopped in the middle of her remark about Todd's hair and looked in the backseat at Alex for the first time since she had gotten in the car. Ellie began to retort before devolving into a shocked reaction,

"Who pissed in your cereal this mor-...Oh my God, what happened to your face?!"

Alex had completely forgotten all about the pain, but the new appear-

ance of her sliced and swollen forehead was still fresh in her mind. She was used to the cuts and bruises, but this one was particularly bad.

"Don't worry about it. I just took a fall last night that's all," Alex replied.

Her best friends looked at her, and then at each other with a kind of disgust as Mackenzie uttered a simple, "Oh." They immediately went back to talking about Todd. Alex scoffed and flung the car door open as she stepped out and headed into the building. Everyone was giving her weird looks, she was ashamed and just wanted to go home.

"ALEX!!" She heard a voice call her name from across the hall.

She looked over and saw a skinny, long black-haired kid with black jeans and a grey Led Zeppelin t-shirt waving at her with a friendly smile and one hand on the strap of his backpack. It was Connor. He didn't have a lot of friends at school despite being fairly attractive, yet he was friendly with everyone.

"Are you going to Jared's party tomorrow?" he asked with a kind smile.

"Maybe. I heard about it, but I'm not sure that I want to go," Alex replied turning her head in an attempt to kill the conversation before it had a chance to continue.

"Oh come on. It'll be fun. Put the board down for once," he replied.

Alex jerked her head back swiftly and said, "The annual Street Skate Shredoff in downtown Minneapolis is in a week and I won't lose again. I need to practice, ok?"

"Oh, you're gonna be at the shredoff? I'm..." he began to say, as she stormed off, not giving him a chance to finish his sentence. All day she kept to herself and hardly spoke a word to anyone.

On the way out of school, she walked with Mackenzie and Ellie as the two of them talked about Jared's party. Mackenzie interrupted Ellie to say,

"Who's that girl your boyfriend is talking to?"

"I don't have a boyfriend," Ellie answered.

"Not you. I was talking to Alex," said Mackenzie, pointing towards the left side of the parking lot.

Alex's eyes panned swiftly from the ground to the parking lot to see Jim talking to a tall, brunette girl, with freckles and big brown eyes. It was the pretty girl from Alex's physics class who was always talking to the teacher.

"That's Aurora, the one weirdo that's always sucking up to the teachers like they're her friends. And we're not dating," Alex replied with a snarky tone.

Ellie responded with a shocked, "What?! You guys were together for ages!"

Alex snapped back: "Not anymore."

Mackenzie didn't even look at Alex as she said uttered a simple, "That sucks." Ellie seemed more concerned about Alex's situation than Mackenzie.

"Hey, why don't you come to Jared's party with us?" Ellie asked.

"No," Alex said as she split off into a different direction and got in her car to head home.

On her way home she picked up some wax from the indoor skate park by her house. When she got home her mother greeted her from the couch with a warm,

"Hey Honey, how was school?"

Alex didn't reply. She dropped her book bag on the couch and went downstairs. She grabbed her board from her room and went back outside to the same spot that had left such a noticeable mark on her face. She waxed up the rail and immediately went for the tre flip into dark slide. She didn't even do a warm-up. The first few times she couldn't land the dark catch and ended up falling on the pavement. She continued to go for it for the next few hours. She had taken a couple of mean falls but she was used to it. It was just her casual Friday night, alone with nothing but a board, some metal blasting in her ears, and dirty scrapes covering her lower body. At about 8 o'clock, she finally hit the dark slide but failed to slip her board back to its usual orientation and proceeded to hit her shoulder on the asphalt and roll out of a potential injury. "YES!!" she exclaimed, "I'm almost there!"

With that, she went inside and played drums until she went to bed.

The next day she was feeling extremely confident due to her sticking that dark slide she had been trying so desperately to land, regardless of whether she was able to ride it out. She thought she'd treat herself and just relax for the day. It was the night of Jared's party and he only lived about two miles from her. Later that night, once she saw people on social media posting at Jared's house she grabbed her board and headed over.

When she showed up, the back door was open and she could hear the sound of an 808 bass of some modern trap song she didn't recognize. She let herself in, and for the first while nobody took notice of her. She saw what looked like the back of Mackenzie and Ellie's heads and went up to them. As she approached, she faintly heard a voice that sounded like Mackenzie's saying something like

"It's so gross, she looks like Quasimodo now. She's been so boring and dry recently, I'm done with her."

"Seriously," Ellie added "She looks like something out of a horror movie. And yeah she is boring, her jokes never make any sense and she's so annoying, no wonder he boyfriend dumped her."

Alex wasn't sure she had heard the two correctly so she still walked up and greeted them.

"Hey guys," Alex said.

"Oh, hey, you came. What's up?" Mackenzie replied.

Before Alex could respond Mackenzie turned her head and continued talking to the guys she had been talking to, but it was clear she was making an effort to come up with a new topic of conversation. Alex recognized she didn't belong in the group and continued walking in search of someone to hang out with. She noticed Connor from across the basement and quickly walked the other way. Connor annoyed her and she didn't even know why. He was just always so nice and enthusiastic. He was a guitarist in multiple bands with a very distinct sense of strange, almost theatrical humor. He didn't have a clique or even a clear friend group. He just liked talking to people and was very tolerant of everyone's interests and personalities. For some reason it got on Alex's nerves. She was irritated by his positivity and passion. She approached Jared because it was his party and she sat behind him in Spanish class.

"Hey, Jared," she said.

"Oh, what's up? Do I know you?" he responded with a confused look on his face while failing to maintain eye contact and instead glancing at her injured forehead.

Alex looked surprised and somewhat offended.

"It's me, Alex. Alex Medley, from Spanish," she said.

He still looked confused. After a moment of glaring at her up and down he recognized her.

"Oh, geez, what happened to your face?" he asked.

"Just a hard fall," she responded.

Jared's girlfriend noticed Alex talking to him and was upset by it. She butted into the conversation,

"Hey, Alex. How does it feel being the only emo girl at school?" she asked. "I bet it's hard dressing like that for attention all the time."

"What?" Alex asked. "I'm not emo."

Alex was very upset by the question. Her Uncle Jonathan had turned her on to her music and passion for skating, even her clothing style. He was like a father figure to her. She decided that she didn't belong here, so she made her way to the door to leave. Just as she reached for the doorknob she heard a voice.

"ALEX!" the voice yelled, "YOU CAME!"

Alex turned around, it was Connor walking toward her with a smile.

"How are you, man?" he asked.

"I'm good," she said without making eye contact.

"Hey, I love your shirt," he said pointing at her white *The Wall* by Pink Floyd shirt.

"I heard you play drums. I play guitar. We should jam sometime."

"Yeah, maybe," said Alex.

Then "Give it Away" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers came on as Connor flamboyantly air-guitared the iconic bend in the intro.

"Ugh, that's my cue to leave." Alex said, "I frickin' hate the Red Hot Chili Peppers."

Connor stopped what he was doing as his jaw dropped. He could not believe what he just heard. They were his favorite band. Alex walked out the door, out to the street, threw her board down in front of her, hopped on, and went home. She couldn't get what Mackenzie and Ellie were saying about her out of her head. More than that she couldn't get over the fact that she acted like she hadn't heard them.

The following Monday after school she went back to preparing her best trick for the shredoff on Saturday. It was the first time she had practiced since Friday. She couldn't seem to land any part of the trick. She couldn't get the tre flip, and when she did she couldn't stick the dark catch. Even in the times she landed both, she completely missed the handrail. Alex became frustrated with herself and after a mere approximate 90 minutes, she had decided she was done for the night. The next day she was able to hit the tre flip into dark slide, but again could not stick the landing and ride it out, same as Friday. On Wednesday, after a few long hours of hard falls and frustrating bails, she finally stuck the trick. She hit it twice before she decided she was done for the night.

On Thursday, she was walking through the halls as she heard a large clash of something hard against the lockers. When she looked across the hall, she noticed a bunch of kids laughing and crowded around in a circle. She began walking over and joined the circle. She noticed a small black kid with frosted tipped dreadlocks that covered his face being pushed up against the locker by a student that looked like he could be someone's dad. The dad was wearing pre-torn grey jeans, a wife-beater, and white Jordan's.

He scolded the dreadlock guy saying, "Don't even step near me again, three wheels. Do you know how expensive these shoes are?! If I see your nasty leg around these halls again, you better run, if you even can run

with that thing, freak.”

Alex was confused, she got on the tip of her toes to get a better look as she whispered to herself, “Three wheels?” She didn’t understand the insult until further inspection when she realized the dreadlock kid had a prosthetic leg with dirty, torn-up, black Vans. The dad said, “get on the ground and lick the scuff off my shoes!” The dreadlock kid just stared at him. “NOW!” He yelled. The dreadlock kid got on the floor and started licking his shoes like a dog. Alex wanted to do something about it, but she couldn’t find the courage. She didn’t want to look like an idiot.

On the way out of school that day she saw Connor again and she deliberately began to take the long route out of the building in hopes of avoiding an unwanted conversation.

“Alex!” she heard him say. She scrunched her face as if she had been caught doing something she shouldn’t. Alex kept walking, pretending she didn’t hear him.

“Alex! Hey!” Connor said. “I forgot to tell you something.”

She reluctantly turned around and said, “What’s up?”

“Funny Bone is playing the shredoff,” Connor said.

“Funny Bone? What’s that?”

“My band.”

Alex couldn’t help but let out a little chuckle.

“Sorry,” she said. “That’s a cool name.”

Connor laughed “No it’s not, I chose it because it was stupid.”

Alex laughed with him. They joked around for a bit in the halls before Alex killed the conversation and went home to practice. She practiced for hours on end that night. After all, the shredoff was the next day. She was outside until 12, but she had finally managed to land the tre flip into dark slide she had been desperately trying to land for a week consistently.

Next thing she knew, it was 6 o’clock the next day, and she was at the skate park on a cool June evening in Minneapolis warming up for the two-part shredoff event that was to start in an hour. The mark on her forehead had almost completely faded and she was ready to compete.

The first part of the competition was the street skate competition. Skaters would be given 90 seconds individually to skate around and hit whatever tricks they can. Once their time had expired they would be evaluated on a 10-point scale by five judges for a total of 50 potential points. After that, the second half of the competition would be worth another 50 points, only this time, the competitors would be evaluated on their best trick. Skaters would be granted three attempts and the attempt that scored highest would be the one to count for points. The skater with the best score of 100 would go home with \$1,000 dollars cash and a photo op with Independent.

It had gotten to be 6:30 p.m. when Alex saw Connor and his band start setting up in the grass by the pavement. She was confused, she only noticed three other competitors. They all seemed slightly younger than her with the exception of one some-twenty-year old man covered in tattoos. By the time it was 7 o’clock and the shredoff was set to start there were only four of them. Alex was set to go last. She was nervous. She felt like the underdog. She felt like she had something to prove. She had lost her boyfriend and realized that she didn’t have any real friends, and because of this she felt like she was at a serious disadvantage. Alex felt a hand on her shoulder, and when she looked back Connor was standing there with his arm extended for a fist bump.

“Good luck. Go shred some face off, broseph,” he said.

Before she could respond, the announcer’s voice came through a megaphone and started the event. Once he had explained the rules, he introduced the contestants, saying,

“Our first skater is going to be Chris Lee. Next up we have Frank Walker. Then we have Marshall Thomas. After that, we have Alex Medley.”

The announcer sounded confused as he said, “And lastly, we have Jeremiah Jackson.... who apparently isn’t here. Nevertheless, let the shredoff begin.”

The crowd roared, and it was a pretty big turnout. The shredoff was a big deal to younger people in Minneaoplis.

“Chris Lee, you’re up,” said the announcer.

Connor and his band started playing “Debaser” by The Pixies as Chris prepared himself. Alex watched as the kid dropped in and started his line. He was doing well, but sticking to very basic moves. He mainly went for kickflips and pop-shuvs, and was noticeably avoiding grinds which were easy points. He took a fall at about the 60 second mark, but continued to go on. At the end of it, he scored a 27. It wasn’t bad, but not the score you’d hope for. As the competition went on, Alex became more confident. She was up last and by the time she was up for her 90 second line, the scores she had to compete with were 27, 25, and 32.

Alex prepared herself mentally, and before she knew it she was dropping in. For some reason all she could think about was making her uncle proud, and how she felt the past February when she heard he died. Despite this, she still landed every trick with precision, and before she knew it, her 90 seconds was up. She had demolished the competition, finishing the first portion of the competition with a comfortable 43 points. As she walked off, the band had just finished playing. And then she noticed the fifth contestant from across the park.

“Jeremiah Jackson, has shown up a bit late but just in time for the competition,” said the announcer.

It was a 5’2 black kid with a man bun and long baggy pants. Next thing she knew, he was dropping in and making everyone look stupid. He finished with a 49, only losing one point due to a slightly sketchy landing on an impossible flip. When he finished the crowd erupted. He had no expression, he just walked off with his head down and sat in the grass. The crowd erupted with oohs and aahs. He had made Alex look like an amateur before she could even get a good look at him.

Alex began to sweat. She had been through so much. This was her passion, her time to prove herself. This was her competition. She wasn’t just going to let some kid who hasn’t had a struggle in his life take away what she had worked so hard for.

The second half of the competition had started and Alex didn’t even pay attention to the first three competitors as they attempted their tricks. She only focused on getting herself in the right head space to land the trick that she had only managed to land a handful of times. When it was her turn for the best trick section, the scores she was up against closely resembled the first half. They were 24, 30, and 26. Alex was given the green light to begin attempting her trick. On the first attempt she landed her tre flip into dark catch, but got caught on the handrail and had to bail. Her second attempt, she completely whiffed the handrail. She audibly cursed to herself as she walked back to set up for her final attempt. It was all on the line this time. For her last chance, she went for

the tre flip, but lost control of the board. The deck hit, her ankle, knocking her off of her balance, and causing her to hit the same exact spot of her forehead as before on the rail. She walked off, bloody and embarrassed.

Connor stepped away from the band mid-song and went to check on her. He grabbed some ice and a towel from the concession stand and sat with her, holding it up to her head.

"Thanks, Connor. You don't have to do this," she said.

"Are you kidding? Of course," he said with his usual kind smile.

"No. Seriously, I'm fine. Besides you have a set to finish."

"There are only like two songs left. Don't sweat it."

"Connor, I said I'm fine, please."

Connor reluctantly went to pick up his guitar and complete the set. Just as the band started playing again, it was Jeremiah's turn. Alex had scored no points in the second portion of the competition, so she already knew she had lost. She looked up from the ground while holding the ice against her eye to see Jeremiah in front of her about to attempt his trick. As she glared up at him, she noticed a very familiar looking pair of dirty black Vans. Before she could process where she had seen them, he hopped on his board and skated to a 5 stair with a handrail in the center of it. He popped an impossible flip 180 into a tail slide and rode it out like it was easy on his first attempt. While he was in the air, Alex caught a glimpse of his baggy pants lifting above his ankle and didn't see skin, but metal. It was the dreadlock kid that she had so ashamedly failed to stand up for! She couldn't believe that she had been shown up at her own game by a kid with one leg. Alex wasn't even upset, just inspired. As Jeremiah landed the trick, the crowd went crazy. He kept his eyes at a 45-degree angle toward the ground and left the skate park. He was gone before he could see that the judges had given him a perfect score. He left without even knowing that he had gotten a 99 out of 100 in the competition.

After the event was over and the band was loading out, Alex approached Connor and said, "Thanks again. You shouldn't have stopped playing for me, though."

"I'm glad I did. I think everyone thought you died. That fall looked like it hurt."

"What? No. It felt great," Alex replied in a sarcastic tone.

The two of them laughed and continued talking. It was the first time she had talked to him and had a good time before. She always saw Connor as the weird kid while she hung out with the popular kids. It wasn't until that conversation that she realized just how similar they were. The only difference before was that Connor was always comfortable in his own skin and never cared how other people saw him on some imaginary ladder of social status. Alex uttered the words that she never thought she would utter:

"Hey, do you wanna come over and jam?"



photo by Chris Meier, alumnus

Coffee Notes

by Chris Schilligo, '22

A small, red sedan swerved into the local coffee shop's parking lot. It was a crisp Monday morning, approximately 6:00 AM. A young man groggily stumbled out of his vehicle, reached into the backseat, and grabbed a shiny pair of gold headphones. He slipped the headphones on top his messy, brown hair and proceeded to enter the coffee shop. A bell chimed as he opened the door. He felt an onslaught of burnt coffee and premade pastries strike his nose. A male barista behind the counter waved at him with a smile and he reciprocated. The staff knew who he was and his exact order from the amount of sugar he liked to the temperature he preferred his blueberry muffin to be. Normally, these baristas wouldn't care to remember anyone else's order, but this man was there every day. He also tipped well, which further incentivized the great service.

"Large coffee and muffin for James!" the barista exclaimed.

The man rose out of his seat and walked up towards the counter to grab his order. Right before he grabbed it, the barista motioned James to take his headphones off.

"I just gotta know, what are you listening to all the time?" he asked.

"Hmmm, well, today I'm listening to Michael Jackson, but tomorrow might be a Prince kinda day," James said cheerfully.

James placed \$10 in the tip jar and smiled at the barista. He sipped his coffee as he walked out. *Perfect, like always.* He could feel the heat of the muffin seep through the paper bag it was placed in. He always waited until he got home to eat his muffin so it could cool down a little. Normally he would've gone straight to his car after leaving, but he felt a slight pull on his jacket. He turned around to find a little boy tugging on his coat and pointing at his head. James wasn't sure how to react. He couldn't tell if this boy was asking for help or if he was just being a silly kid. After all, he looked like a toddler who was no more than three years old.

"Parker! Don't pull on that man's jacket! Get over here now."

James looked up to find a woman making her way towards him. It looked like she grew taller with each step.

"I'm so sorry he was bothering you. He doesn't normally go up to strangers like that," she said as she glanced down towards the boy, who was now laughing his head off.

"Oh my gosh, it's alright. I get it. Kids just being kids," James replied.

The two of them shared a cordial laugh. The woman's eyes started to look around James' head, seemingly entranced by his headphones.

"Is everything alright? You're looking at me like I have two heads," he said.

"Sorry, yeah everything's good. I just can't stop looking at your headphones. They're surprisingly reflective. My little brother was probably trying to get a better look at those. Parker, apologize to him," she said.

Parker switched his gaze back and forth between James and the

woman a couple of times.

"I haf to go potty, Lizzy," Parker muttered.

Lizzy slightly shook her head in disbelief. James started to chuckle under his breath.

"That's the best apology I've ever gotten," James said. "So your name's Lizzy?"

"I really go by Liz. This little guy's the only one who calls me Lizzy," she said. "And you?"

"Everyone calls me James," he replied.

James and Liz smiled at each other. Both would've continued talking if Parker hadn't started to drag Liz towards the bathroom. Liz awkwardly waved as she tried to keep her balance and James reciprocated as he left the shop. The only thing James could think about on the drive home was this interaction. Secretly, he hoped that she would be at the coffee shop the next day. But they didn't cross paths until the following Monday.

That day, James stumbled out of his car with the same headphones he always wore. The pleasant chime woke him up a little more, but not enough to break his tiredness. That's what the coffee was for. The same barista waved and smiled like he always did and James instinctively waved back.

"Large coffee and muffin for James!" the barista exclaimed.

"How do you guys always make my order so fast?" James asked.

"I'll let you in on a little secret. The pastries are heated up in a microwave behind the counter and the coffee is probably weeks old. But you didn't hear that from me," the barista replied.

James wasn't too concerned about the means by which his coffee and muffin were made. He only cared about waking up. James tipped the barista as always and started to walk out of the shop like he normally did. Right before he made it to the door, a familiar child ran in front of him almost causing him to spill his coffee. The kid tripped over his feet and fell, sliding on the ground from the momentum of his speed. Then, Liz appeared from the corner of James' eye. She made her way over to Parker, scooped him off the ground, and threw him over her shoulder like a sack of potatoes. She noticed James and she walked by and waved at him. After picking Parker up she made her way over to James.

"How funny. I didn't think I'd run into you again!" Liz said.

James slid his headphones off his ears. Music faintly played through the headphones as he took them off.

"What a coincidence! Do you guys come here every morning?" he asked.

"We're only here on Monday mornings. The only thing that motivates him to get ready for school is a chocolate muffin from this place," she said.

She paused for a moment and stared at James' headphones again.

"Were you listening to *Full Moon* by Brandy? That's my favorite song."

James was caught off guard. He didn't know anyone else who liked Brandy as much as he did.

"So you like Brandy and you have the same favorite song as me," he started. "The coincidences just keep lining up."

A mutual interest started to form between the two after this interaction. James thought she was cool and Liz liked his taste in music. They exchanged phone numbers and planned to meet outside of their Monday morning bump-ins. Liz walked out of the shop first, carrying a hysterical

Parker with her. James laughed to himself as he put his headphones on. He opened his phone and set *Full Moon* to repeat.

James spent the rest of the week waiting for Liz to send him a text. He hoped that she would follow up with him, maybe to pick out a day to meet up or just to talk about music. But he found himself more and more disappointed every day that he didn't get a text. This lasted up until the next Monday where, surely enough, he saw her at the coffee shop.

This time seemed a little different than before. The familiar bell chime didn't spark any sort of reaction like it normally did for James. He did his normal routine: wave and smile, chat with the barista, tip, and leave. It wasn't until he reached the parking lot that he saw Liz who was parked on the far end of the lot. He set down whatever was in his hands and walked out the shop.

"Parker, please just be a good kid. Help me out here," she yelled.

Parker's usual giggles could be heard from a mile away. James decided to start walking over towards her car. Liz noticed that he was walking towards her and waved, but she seemed a little distressed.

"Is everything okay? You look a little stressed out," he said.

Liz looked at him and smiled sarcastically.

"I've definitely been better. I'm just running a little late, that's all," she said. "Somehow he got himself tied up in his car seat and I can't get him out of it."

James looked into the backseat of her car to find Parker completely knotted up in his seat. Parker, of course, thought this was the funniest thing ever. Luckily, James always carried a pocket knife with him. He cut away at the straps until the knot was gone, finally allowing Liz to strap Parker in.

"Thank you, you're such a lifesaver!" Liz said.

She turned around and hugged James with what felt like all her might. James wasn't sure why she hugged him like that, but he enjoyed it nonetheless.

"What is it you're running late for again?" he asked.

"I gotta catch a plane to Illinois, it boards in 45 minutes. I got a good job opportunity up there," she said.

"Alright then, I don't wanna make you any later, have a safe flight!" he said.

Liz hugged him one last time, hopped in her car, and sped out of the parking lot. James was pretty disappointed he didn't get to make official plans with her. He originally thought she ghosted him, but she was so friendly moments ago. The thought that he might not see her again made him sad. All the sudden, he realizes he left his coffee and muffin in the coffee shop. He jogged back from the end of the parking lot to the shop.

He saw that his order had remained untouched on the counter and let out a small sigh of relief. He walked over and picked it up, but the barista waved him down before he could leave. James made his way over to the barista.

"I don't know what this is about, but a woman left this behind for you," the barista said.

He then handed James and \$10 gift card with a note attached to it. James looked back and for the between the card and the barista, who looked about as clueless as he did. James sat down at the nearest table to read the note. One side of the note had a QR code on it and the other side had a neatly hand-written message.

James,

I told the barista to give this to you the next time you were there. Consider this an apology for Parker nearly tripping you the other day. I was looking forward to hanging out, but guess who dropped my phone in the toilet? Even though we didn't get to actually hang out I wanted to say thanks for being kind to us!

Love,

Liz

p.s. Don't forget to scan the QR code!

James laughed happily after reading the note she left him. He felt better knowing that she wasn't avoiding him that whole time. He flipped the note over and pulled out his phone. He pointed the camera on his phone at the QR code. After seeing what popped up, James slid his headphones back on his head and sat in the coffee shop for a while.

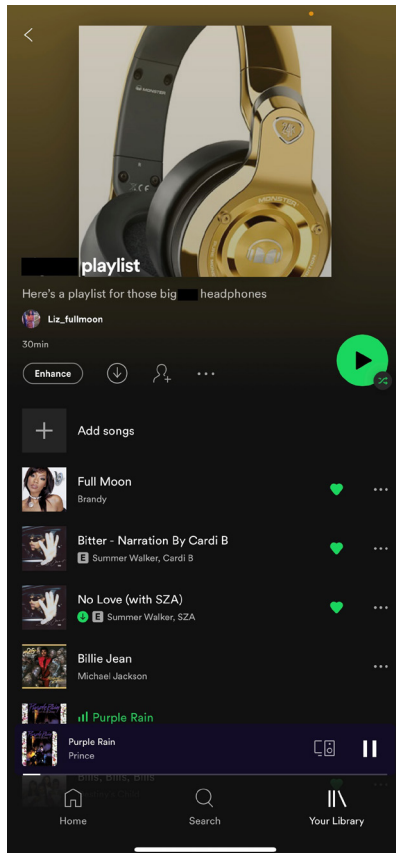


photo by Chris Schilligo, '22