BÁRBARA CHECHILNITZKY

The Grange School

1st Place in the ESU Chile Creative Writing Competition
2023
Senior Category

This document contains two texts. First one is the Round 1 Finished Work Entry on the theme of "Family". Second one was done on the day of the in-person final 10th June 2023, as a Freewrite/First Draft activity with the following prompt: "Write about the friendship that inspired your favourite song."

ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION
discovering voices

First Text: Round 1 Entry

Homeward Bound

Mother always said, "*Be good and nice things will happen."*

The sound of my feet hitting stone as I thundered downhill cracked into my ears, disrupting the early morning silence, making me keenly aware of every step as if it was a force pulling me back.

I was never one for nice anyways.

Hues of pink and orange begin to appear on the horizon just as the docks come into view. A wave of fresh ocean air hit me and I realised how cold it was.
What if, what if, what if?
I stumble.
No.
It's too late now… I'll have to tough it out. Out. In the deep sea. Alone.

Adrenaline rushes through my veins as I think. Think. Doubt.
I race towards the docks, my feet finally carrying me where my head has been so many times.
I don't have time to think.

The docks are coming to life around me, the quiet bustling of early risers not wishing to wake the still-sleeping civilians, fishing boats returning to shore with their fill for the day. Waves crashing into shore.

My head is pounding.

The sky is clearing, intensifying, shedding the pink and orange and revealing a sharp blue.
The wind is picking up, just like I had predicted.

I slow down the pace; I don't want to call attention to myself.

The sea breeze prickles my bare arms and legs, as I walk down the docks towards a familiar sail, my cotton trousers and shirt waving in the wind.
Mine. Not really mine. Would he notice they were gone?

I finally find what I'm looking for.

I jump onto the sailboat and, immediately filled with comfort, I set down my bag —it doesn't take up much space, and I didn't want to risk bringing anything but the bare necessities— and get to work.
I start untangling ropes, unfurling and then trimming the sails.

"What in God's name do you think you're doing?"

A voice from behind me.
No.
No.
I drop everything.

"What are *you* doing here?" I reply in the same icy tone, "Are you following me?"
"You first"
"I don't have to tell you anything" I retort, regretting the poison leaving my tongue with every word and struggling to keep my face from displaying any emotion.

Her face changes; her scowl turns into a furrowed brow and pursed lips.

Pause.

"I"

"You're leaving aren't you" "I'm sorry"

Our words clash, my regret with hers, the feeling of not enough, not enough to make me stay, and too much, too much to keep living a lie. Guilt.

The sun hits her face and for a moment I see my own reflection.
That's what she has always been:
A mirror,
She is what could be,
What should be.

The sun hits her in just the right angle, her golden hair tumbling down in perfect curls, her cheeks rosy from the cold, her eyes reflecting the sea-green hue of the waves looking at me accusingly. I remember my own sunken eyes and chapped lips, my gaunt face and pale skin. She stands on the dock, looking down upon me.

“You don’t understand,” I say
“What don’t I understand?” She says, in that manner she uses when people are just ‘being insensible’ and ‘if you’d just let me talk to her she’d understand’, talking down to them from her moral pedestal.

“You don’t *get* what it’s like.” I know I shouldn’t start a fight. I know.
Time is ticking.
The sun is rising.
“How did you even know I was here?” the question leaves my lips before I can stop it.
“I know you.”

Pause.

“I followed you.”

“Did I wake you?”

She looks down, picking at her fingers. I should've been more careful. Has anyone else noticed? I keep working at the knots; time is running out.

“I noticed some of Andrew's clothes were missing a few weeks ago,” My stomach dropped.
“I scolded him for losing them but he swears he hadn't,”

“I found them while cleaning out under your bed”

“Annie, I-”

“It’s Anne, Lousie.” Her face becomes stern.

“Annie? Are you joking?” I spat “Anne? Who do you think-”

And she interrupts me. Quiet, returning the poison I had dealt.
“Mother is going to kill you,” her eyes cold and piercing.

I turn away.
My hands tremble with rage.

“I cannot believe you, Annie.”
“Anne.”
I bite down on my jaw, swallowing the words that I know I can’t take back. I want to tell her everything, I want to tell her exactly why I cannot stay, how much I miss her by my side. Selfish, that would be selfish. How could I be so selfish?

“I miss you, you know.”

Her perfect life all tumbling down, the curtain drawn, the show over.

“Miss me? Louise, stop this nonsense, and come *home*.”

And just like that, I cannot stop myself.

“It's not Home anymore Annie!” the words tumble out of my mouth before I can stop them, a river of words I had been keeping in. “It hasn’t been for a long time.” A river that had become an ocean.

A gust of wind lifts and I know my time is running out.

I keep my gaze firm, I can see she's holding back tears.

"Don't do this to me Louise" her voice breaks, "I-"

"I have to." I dig my nails into my fist, "I have to do it for me."

"You're being selfish," she says.
"Selfish?" *I am being selfish, she'll think it's her fault.*
"I'll talk to Mother, I'll make things right, she'll understand-"
"Understand?" *she'll never understand.*
"She always says "*be good and nice things will happen",* you just have to-"
"Annie, *I'll never be good enough for her" pulling the string, drawing the curtain,*

Pause.

"It's Anne."

Pause.

"I'm leaving."
"Where?"

I turn away from her and gaze at the horizon, the bright blue sky, and feel my hair moving in the wind. The waves crashing in the distance, I feel a force pulling towards the deep, towards the wild, towards the unknown.

"I don't know," and comfort fills me, drowning out the anger and anxiety.

I turn back to face her and see that tears are spilling from her eyes.
She quickly wipes them from her face, leaving puffy eyes and a red nose.
Oh Annie

I look into her eyes and reach out for understanding for the first time since I lost my sister.

For the first time.
For the last time.

Her gaze softens, but she doesn’t understand.
The sun hits her face and she doesn’t understand.

The wind picks up, beating the sails wildly.
Now or never,
Doubt.
Be good.
Pause.
Undo the knot holding the boat from the dock.
Trim the sail.

Turn away. Sail away.

I look at the horizon, the sun peeking out, barely touching the line separating the ocean and the sky. That's where I want to go. Nowhere, Everywhere. I’m not *good, I'm* too much to ever be *good.*

I’m too much,
I’m meant for *more.*
I’m selfish,
Oh Annie,

I’m Sorry

Second Text: Free Write/First Draft 10th June 2023

"THE CHESS BOARD"

Ok, let's try this one more time.

Deep breaths.

In.
Out.

The fire will not get the best of you this time.

At least, I hope.

I put on my uniform carefully, my head racing, thinking about every subsequent interaction.
Hello, how are you?
No.

I button my shirt, hands trembling

Hi!!
No.

I do up my tie.

Hey, how's it going?
Better.
Better?
Is that better?

I messed up my tie.

My stomach begins to churn.
Here we go again.

I undo my tie and do it up again, being careful with every movement.

I look out the window and see the bus to school.
Oh god.

Every step is painful.
My head starts to pound, as if a million beetles were making their way inside of my cranium, building up pressure. Their tiny legs exerting force on my brain, fogging it up, lighting it on fire.

Deep breaths,
In,
Out.

The yellow bus comes to a screeching halt a couple houses down from my own.
Again.
So off I go, hurriedly waddling with my heavy backpack and my sports bag oscillating from side to side. *They're all looking at me aren't they*.

I come to the door and stand there panting for a few seconds,
One,
Two,
Three,
Four,
Until finally the bus driver notices my predicament and opens the door.

And I begin.

As we rehearsed, one step at a time, sideways this time, so that you don't knock anyone or anything over. *You're so clumsy.*

“Hey!” I call out to a group of familiar faces at the back when I finally manage to squeeze myself down the narrow hallway that leads to the seats “how’re you doing?
Wait, wasn’t it how’s it going? Oh god you messed up again.

A silence falls over the bus as I make my way to the back row.

Pawn to D2.

“Hi” she responds.
Short and sweet, just ‘Hi’.

Silence.

I set down my bags and sit down one row in front of her— she always sits in the back row.

You did it again. You built this problem all yourself; if you could just be more like her, none of this would have happened. Today would have been the day.

I look sideways and catch her exchanging glances with one of her friends.
Friends.
Am I her friend?
She always says so.

The silence is deafening. I can only hear the chatter of the smaller children in the front seats, and the ever constant moan of the old and tired engine.
I can only hear their conversation resume, as if I wasn’t even there.
My stomach tightens, as if tentacles were invading and squeezing until my lungs run out of air and crushing my bones into tiny shards which pierce my skin until the blood reaches my throat and captures my voice.
I hear their conversation silently.

She had made her move, knight to E4.

And so I sit in silence.

Tentacles squeezing, "*are you all going to the party?" What party? I check my phone.*
Nothing.
Beetles crawling, "*you better like the gift I got you!" Gift?*
Head pounding, *"Of course I'll like it! It's the thought that counts, no?"*
Stomach churning, *gifts for her? Her birthday was last week wasn't it?*
Brain on fire, *"Well I'm expecting you all there!" All? "All my dearest friends!"*
I hate myself, "When is the party?" I ask, very obviously interrupting?

I made my move, rook to G7.

I wait.
One,
Two,
Three,
Four,
Five,
Six,
Seven,

Silence.

Sometimes I wish I could show them the whole conversation I have with myself in my head.
I'm sure they would like me better then.
She would like me better.

Silence.

Silence so loud and so real it shakes my body, I tremble, but I steady myself.
Deep breaths,
In,
Out.

In,
Out.

In,
out
In, out.
In, out, in, out, in out, in, in, out, in out, inout, in, out.
And beetles and slimy spiders and cockroaches crawling out of their lairs, their slimy crevices and marching hurriedly into my head, building up pressure.
And tentacles wrapping themselves around my stomach, squeezing tighter and tighter and tighter.
Sharp claws tearing at my insides, making me bleed.
As she sets my brain on fire once more with her silence.

Eight,
Nine,
Ten,
Eleven,
Twelve,
Thirteen,

Giggles and whispers, the engine, the chatter.
In,
Out,
In,
Out.

Spiders biting, beetles crawling.
In, out, in, out.

White makes their move.
Queen to G5.

Check.

“What party?”

The fire spreads.
What party?

I look at her,
'All my dearest friends!'

"What party?" She repeats, as if confused, as if I was invisible, as if I was disposable.
They giggle, they look at each other knowingly as if to say *thank God she saved us from having to hang out with her*
With *that.*

Check mate.

The bus comes to a violent stop. I fly forward.
You messed it up again.
She's only your friend because she pities you.

They all pick up their school bags and turn to leave.

Deep breaths.

In.

Out.

They leave.
Coldly.

And I'm left with a used chessboard and a brain on fire, and the only thing I can think to do is cry.

So I do.
And I cry,
And cry,

And cry.

And then, sitting in front of my chessboard, someone comes along and asks me:

“What’s that?” They inquire, tilting their head and pointing at the board.

And I politely respond,

“A friend.”

They laugh, “That’s not what a friend is!”
And with their laughter, I feel cold water trickling on to my brain and down my spine.
Maybe some smoke, and a bit of insecticide, for a while.
And I cough, and they laugh, and they help me put the fire out.

And sometimes I cry.
And they hand me a sword, and we slash the tentacles, and the claws.
And they give me bandages.

And when I ask,

“Well, what is a friend?”

They ponder,
One,
Two,

(They never ponder for too long)

And then they take my hand and lift me out of my seat

and flip over the chessboard.