



HUArt

ISSUE 1

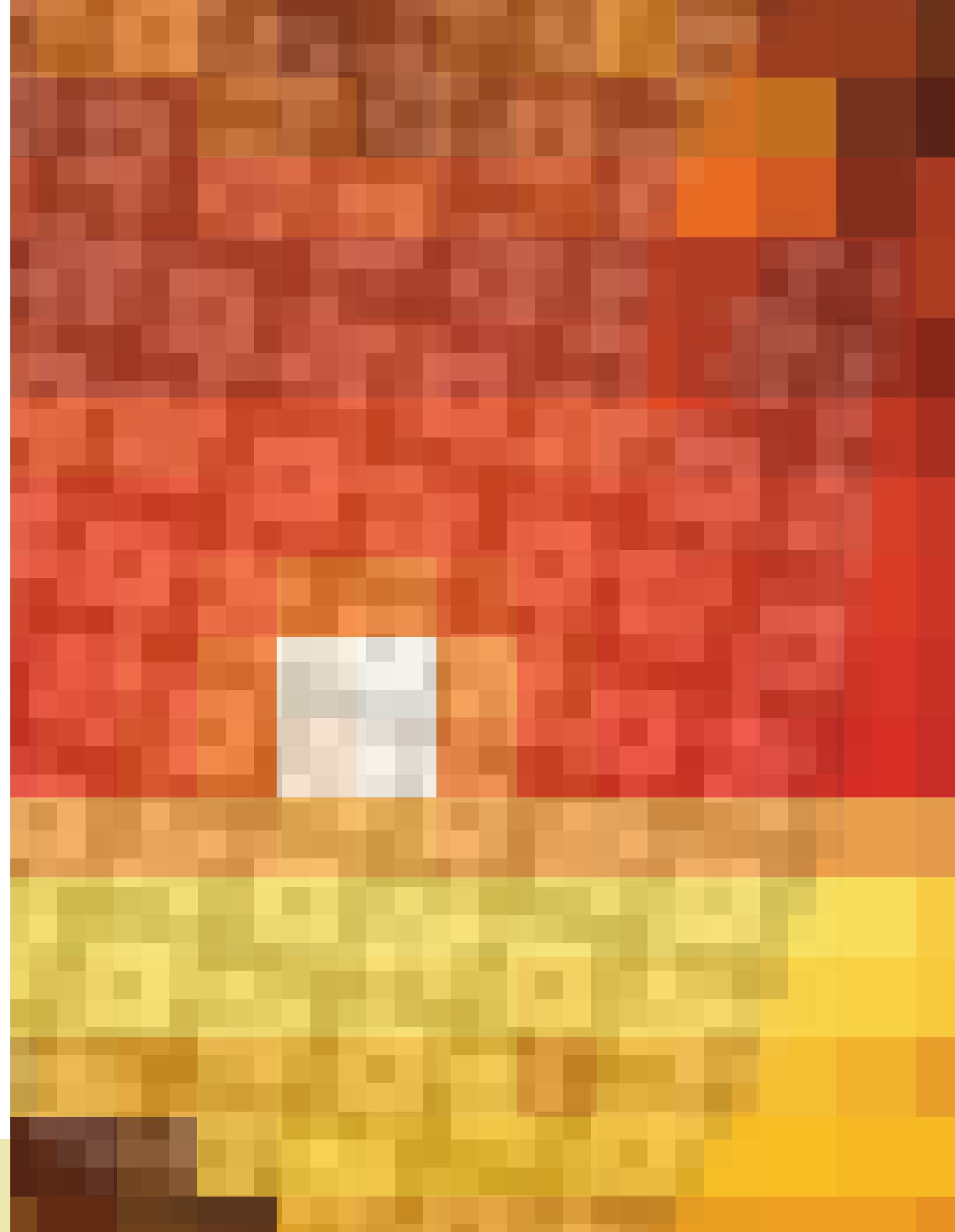
THE FIRST ISSUE OF HU.ART

Welcome to the first issue of
Hu.Art, a biannual humanities and
arts journal.

In this journal we will have a
short poem about the sky, a poem
about a storm, a poem about a girl
of mystery, original art, an essay
on William Blake, an essay about
lichens, and a short story.

From spritely poems to informative
essays, this first issue of Hu.Art is a
celebration of the very best work of
each person.

Enjoy reading!



THE GIRL OF THE SEA

A SONNET BY ROISIN A. GILBERT

Across the beautiful sea she flies
Something flying in the strongest winds
Her eyes as blue as the daytime sky
Could she ever think of sinning a sin?

Does she believe she is beautiful?
Does she know she is one of a kind?
For only some know she is wonderful
What will the people who don't soon find?

What is her name, people will soon ask
For no person has not ever known
People also think she wears masks
Her beauty is just too great to be shown

For I have always known her nice name
It is a name that holds no shame

ABOUT ROISIN A. GILBERT

My name is Roisin Gilbert,
I love poetry and writing
and I am ten years old. I
love Shakespeare's work
especially his sonnets. My
favorite is sonnet number
60. I play rugby and I play
the Irish Whistle and the
Irish Fiddle and the Irish
Flute. I also do Gymnastics.

INI THAT WAR

A POEM BY MAGGIE WREN

In that War...
Lightning strikes. There's a Beat...
getting inside my ear...
wind Pranced at my Hair all Cold...
I Hear the Sunny. Funny. Rain.
Falling to my Bed in Deep Sleep

UNTITLED

A DRAWING BY ZOLA A. PRICE



ABOUT ZOLA A. PRICE

Zola lives in Chicago where she recluses in her house with her dog, lizard, and family. Her favorite of everything is lemon with the exception of lemon flavored diet soda, which tastes terrible and contains coal byproducts. Her favorite holiday is national donut day on June 7th.

WILLIAM BLAKE

AN ESSAY BY BEN MEDINA

The very fact that William Blake, whose heterodoxical poetry and paganistic views were decried as amoral and blasphemous, barely remained above the poverty level during his life, and was mocked as a madman, is now recognized as one of the most brilliant poets of the Romantic period, is a blow against Moralism. By its nature, moralism as an artistic yardstick is restrictive, since morality changes with time and place. Continuing in the contrarian vein of his life and work, Blake penned *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as a rebuttal to the hegemonic morality of his time period. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is a collection of poetry inspired primarily by *The Bible* and *John Milton's Paradise Lost*. It is an evocation of the dialogue between Heaven and Hell, or morality and art, while simultaneously attacking moralism. Blake's argument against moralism is accomplished by merging the style of Biblical prophecy with his intensely personal, revolutionary beliefs. Blake valued passion and desire over reason and temperance, and believed moralism and organized religion restrain spiritual insight.

Blake takes the perspective of "The Devil's Party" through his poem, adopting a philosophy centering on the core belief that "everything that lives is holy", and "all Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies."

He also writes: "But the following Contraries to these are True:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life and from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

3. Energy is Eternal Delight."

Viewing art through the prism of Moralism is imprisoning. Moralism argues that the ultimate yardstick by which art should be measured is its moral value; an argument found in the "Errors" that Blake argues are present in "all Bibles or Sacred codes".

Moralism is predicated on good and evil behaviors, with what is considered good being encouraged and evil being discouraged. But if, as Blake argues, what is considered evil is actually "Energy," "Eternal Delight" and "the only life," then the rejection of "Evil," which is central to a moralistic view of art, is a rejection of what makes us human. His rejection of Moralism predicated on three core concepts: Primarily, "Energy" is the root of all humanity, manifesting itself as the "Poetic Genius." Secondly, "Reason" has a negative impact when held as more vital than "Energy". Finally, both concepts are necessary—"Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence."

In the poem, Blake travels to the depths of hell and has an audience with the Devil before dining with Isaiah and Ezekiel. Both parties, the prophets and the Devil, represent "Reason and Energy, Love and Hate". They attribute their muse and impetus to the use of sensual experience to create. Blake travels "among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity. I collected some of their Proverbs: thinking that as the sayings used in a nation, mark its character." He arrives at "the abyss of the five senses," when a "mighty devil" appears before him, saying "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?"

Later on in the poem, when Blake meets with Isaiah and Ezekiel, he asks them "how they dared so roundly to aster, that God spoke to them." Isaiah answers "I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception, but my

senses discover'd the infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded, & remain confirmed; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote."

Both parties argue for transcending "your senses five" and "finite organical perception," either to perceive the "immense world of delight" in even the smallest bird, or to "discover the infinite in everything." Having established "human perception" as the root of Reason and Energy, or Good and Evil, Blake elevates art as the mechanism through which transcending the five senses is made possible. "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive." Using their "enlarged and numerous senses," these ancient Poets spun tales into cities—"They studied the genius in each city and country, placing it under its mental deity till a system was formed," and people began "choosing forms of worship from poetic tales."

This connecting strand between hell, Energy, art and creation is solidified in Blake's description of John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*, as well as Ezekiel's testament to the origins of humanity, and the portrayal of hell as a place of knowledge and creation. Blake writes, "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it." "True" poets are associated with the "Devil's party," the source of creative energy and directly at odds with a moralistic approach to art. *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth* argues that art should not be judged as a vehicle for morality, but by its ability to transcend "finite organical perception" and "discover the infinite in everything".

Blake continues his argument for the towering power of art, undiluted by moralism, when Ezekiel speaks during Blake's dinner with the prophets. Ezekiel states: "The philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception: some nations held one principle for the origin & some another; we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests & Philosophers of other countries, and prophecying that all Gods would at last be proved to originate in ours & to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius; it was this that our great poet King David desired so fervently & invokes so pathetic'ly, saying by this he conquers enemies & governs kingdoms; and we so loved our God."

This "Poetic Genius," having motivated poets to "animate all sensible objects," provided people with the chance to "choose forms of worship from poetic tales," and having given "poet King David" the method by which he "conquers enemies and governs kingdoms", can be aptly described as the root of human civilization. If this creative, poetic impulse rests with "the Devil's Party," then the judging of art solely by its morality is truly misguided, according to Blake, because morality itself, religion and human civilization are derived from art, which was then itself derived from "Evil, the Active springing from Energy." Blake then travels to "a Printing house in Hell" to see "the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation." He travels through six chambers: "In the first chamber was a Dragon-Man, clearing away the rubbish from a cave's mouth; within, a number of Dragons were hollowing the cave. In the second chamber was a Viper folding round the rock & the cave, and others adorning it with gold silver and precious stones. In the third chamber was an Eagle with wings and feathers of air: he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite, around were numbers of Eagle like men, who built palaces in the immense cliffs.

In the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire raging around & melting the metals into living fluids. In the fifth chamber were Unnam'd forms, which cast the metals into the expanse.

There they were reciev'd by Men who occupied the sixth chamber, and took the forms of books & were arranged in libraries."

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, hell is the origin of creativity and imagination, a disseminator of knowledge from "generation to generation." This portrayal of hell is a definitive argument against moralism—to crusade for Moralism as the measuring stick of art is to crusade against the impulse that gives rise to art itself.

Blake's recasting of Christ as a defiant iconoclast, friend of artists and revolutionaries, serves to underline the negative impact of a world run purely by Reason. "Know after Christ's death he became Jehovah... the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he who dwells in flaming fire." For Blake, fire is not synonymous with damnation and torment, but with creativity, the fire Prometheus brought to mortals and the discovery of fire by early humanity. This reinvention of Jesus Christ as a Miltonian hero, a figure of Promethean energy, establishes the cyclical vision of the universe *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* puts forth. Energy ages into Reason, fermenting and then being reborn as Energy once again, the "Prolific" into the "Devouring."

Through Blake's quest to witness infinity, one fact remains—"the most sublime act is to set another before you." Blake's Christ was "all virtue, and acted from Impulse, not from Rules," for "no virtue can exist without breaking these Ten Commandments." Moralism is the Ten Commandments applied mechanically to all creative works, with no variation or consideration. As Blake writes, "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression."

In one of the poem's key passages, an allusion to Dante's *Inferno* titled "A Memorable Fancy," Blake paints nightmarish visions of one world ruled purely by Energy, and another world ruled purely by Reason. He is visited by an angel, who says "O pitiable foolish young man! O horrible! O dreadful state! Consider the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself." The Angel leads him through the bowels of a church, a mill, and a cave before they arrive at "an infinite Abyss, fiery as the smoke of a burning city," where a "black but shining" sun is encircled by "vast spiders" crawling after "their prey." As soon as the Angel leaves him, the nightmarish vision of oblivion disappears, replaced by "a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight hearing a harper who sung to the harp, & his theme was, the man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind." This chaotic "eternal lot" to which the angel dooms Blake is a world without the counterbalancing effects of reason. It is pure Energy run amok, which eventually transforms into "the head of Leviathan", a fearsome Biblical beast whose "forehead was divided into streaks of green & purple like those on a tyger's forehead". He advances toward them "with all the fury of a spiritual existence."

Though the "Poetic Genius" is the progenitor of Moralism, and Moralism prohibits virtue in art, "Without Contraries there is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence." According to Blake, "Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell". These contrasting forces are vital for the human race to move forward, with neither overpowering the other. Throughout the poem, these competing concepts reappear in a variety of guises, continuing the cyclical theme of rebirth and reinvention. Marriage of Heaven and Hell is defined by. "Thus one portion of being is the Prolific, the other the Devouring: to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains, but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole." Blake repurposes the imagery associated with Good and Evil, reinventing the dichotomy as one between creation and destruction, or the prolific and devouring. "These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy

existence." Moralism is an attempt to reconcile the two. The "harper who sung to the harp" serves as a reminder that the competing wills of Blake and the angel are both indebted to the "ancient Poets who first animated all sensible objects." Then, Blake shows the angel his eternal fate, the result of Reason run wild, without the balancing influence of Energy. He climbs back to the mill to reconvene with his "friend the Angel." Blake "caught him up" in his arms, flying them into the sun and to Saturn, before forcing the angel ahead of him down into the depths of the pit within a Bible. They enter "seven houses of Brick" and see "a number of Monkeys, baboons, and all that species, chain'd by the middle," and "the weak were caught by the strong", "first coupled with and then devour'd." Blake paints a picture of a terrifying charnel house of chaos and cannibalism. Due to the stench, Blake and the Angel retreat to the Mill. The angel accuses Blake—"thy phantasy has imposed upon me." Blake replies, "We impose on one another." The results of Energy run wild are chaotic itself, but Reason strips away the ambiguous, the Energy, until no humanity is left.

Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth's* rejection of moralism convinced me, as a student of literature and philosophy, that moralism should be kept separate from literature. Literature requires the space to question morality, provide different perspectives or commentary, or revel in its own excesses. The decisive consideration against moralism put forth in Blake's poem is his argument that there are two equal, vital "classes of men, always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence." He labels them "prolific" and "devourer", and they fit into Blake's continuing reinvention of hell as a place of creation, knowledge and study, and heaven as a regulator and rule maker. The act of creation, of shared stories, is uniquely unifying and self-justified.

Art does not need to be justified by morality to exist, to affect and move people. Blake's argument against moralism is built on three key points. The Poetic Genius "was the first principle," it had the ability to transcend "finite organical perception;" to achieve a "perception of the infinite." This transcendence led to the creation of civilization by the "ancient Poets" who "animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses." Blake argues for the power of creation and imagination "in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains". Morality, or Reason, is a restraining, dehumanizing influence, as evidenced by the description of the angel's "eternal lot", in which apes were "first coupled with & then devour'd, by plucking off first one limb and then another till the body was left a helpless trunk". Notably, a spine Blake

takes with him from the encounter in the charnel house transforms into Aristotle's *Analytics*, one of the founding texts of Reason and morality. "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer of reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling." Finally, when Blake travels with the angel, Blake makes his final points: "Opposition is true Friendship," and "everything that Lives is Holy". As Blake's poem demonstrates, moralism is an inadequate, misleading and reductive method of artistic evaluation because it is based on the supposition that "Reason" is right and "Energy" is wrong. However, Energy is the precursor to Reason, Reason without energy has negative effects, and both are needed, at least in equal measure. Art remains the medium through which Blake's Energy expresses itself, so it should remain unregulated by Moralism.

ALL THAT IS SEEN TO BE GOOD

A POEM BY RICHARD MEDINA

Iron rusted cuts the skin
Home of maggots, worms, and dust
That Foul Assassin who dines
On the blood of the son
 Peace be at the heart of the observer,
Fasting untouched from the cold dark knife
Red, the earth turns
Grim Assassin strikes at night
Aided by the stolen thorn
Tears the ground and welcomes storm
 Yield Grim Destroyer!
Cut the wooden chains!
Let me be!
Screams of the dust go unheard
Only grass weeds feel
The bleeding of the scarred
 That plowed earth
That ripped flesh
That petulant cry
Yield!
Cursed be the bull
Who flees from the whip,
Who rips the rose from the thorn
 Cursed be the cow
Whose milk spoils in the bowl,
Whose calf dies in the hay
 Cursed be the ground
Who swallows up the rain,
Who strangles seeds and
drinks the sun
 Cursed be the barn
Whose roots rot in the dust,
Whose doors open to the fly,

Whose rusting locks free the thorn
 Cursed be the plow
Who spits out the soil
Who grows roots and
Rips the flesh of the thorn
 Free the thorn
Free the ground
Free the tree
 All that is seen to be good
Free!
 Free the flesh
Free the bone
Free the mind
 All that is seen to be good
Free!
 Burn the barn
Burn the plow
Burn these wooden chains
 All that is seen to be good
Free!
 Burn the shovel
Burn the gloves
Burn the fence
Burn the rot
 All that is seen to be good
Free!
 Let the sun rise
Let the evil die
 Burn the man down

SPRITE

A DRAWING BY MAURA GILBERT



ABOUT MAURA GILBERT

My name is Maura Gilbert.

My favorite subject is history. I play rugby and the concertina. I am Irish and completely random.

CHECK: OTHER

A SHORT STORY BY APHRA SIMONE PRICE

A young girl sat up on the sidewalk, blinking her still sleep-heavy eyes. She knew that she had a name, had a reason she was here, but couldn't recall it. She hated it, the blankness, the not knowing. She reached out to the far corners of her mind, finding only information that she was certain everyone, or most people, knew. That people grow old and die, that two times five was ten, that four squared was sixteen, how to spell "crystalline" and rubbish like that. Just general learning, she supposed. Not useful to knowing what one's name was. She came to the conclusion that she would have to have a name if someone were to question her. Such a situation could come up. Besides, she felt she needed something to call herself by.

"I guess I'd better make one up then," she thought. She brushed herself off, stood up and decided on Ana. "A last name too then... Brown. Ana Brown. That'll satisfy most people who happen to ask," she mumbled. After deciding on this, however, she realized that she was now standing in the middle of the sidewalk blankly.

"Oh, it's one of you," said a young, female voice. Ana (for this was what she would call herself for a while, not having anything else) jumped at the sound of another person's voice. It was a very early hour, the sun had not yet risen. No one was about except for Ana and the person that had spoken. She turned around and looked, to see where the voice was coming from. It was a girl, in her late teens, leaning out of a door.

"Ugh, I thought Redford told them not to send Others without instructions!" Ana was just perplexed by this. She assumed Redford was a person, but she couldn't really guess as to what an Other was. In response, she said the first thing seeming remotely useful: "My name's Ana Brown."

The girl responded: "All right then, I guess Oliver or Mac can give you a scan. My name is Miura Chang, call me Miura-san. I work here, you have to listen to me." Even with the vague notion that Miura was being rather rude, Ana simply followed her inside the building, though she knew that this was unwise. Perhaps someone here held the answers.

Miura-san or whoever seemed to know what she was doing. Miura grabbed Ana's hand and in a split-second, she was pulling her down an aluminum tiled hallway that seemed to have no end. The walls and ceiling were painted bright pink, which was certainly an odd color for the place. Ana could distinctly hear the sound of someone snoring. Finally, they came to a stop, in front of a large, intimidating metal door with a light above the door handle. There was a slot in the handle, presumably for some kind of key. Miura tried the handle; it was locked. She pulled a key card out of a pocket, jamming it into a slot in the doorknob and swearing loudly each time the light on the door flashed red. Ana was surprised they hadn't woken up the snorer.

Eventually the light flashed green, and they were allowed in. The two then came to another set of doors. Miura walked up to one of the doors, as though she had done it many times before. She tried the handle, and this time it turned, with the door creaking as Miura pushed it open. Inside, there was a man asleep at a rather forlorn-looking metal desk that was bending under the weight of an enormous, equally shabby looking, computer. Miura walked up to the man, and gave a small tug on his hair. It didn't work. She tried again, this time harder. Still, nothing happened. She grunted with annoyance, and slapped him right out of his too-small plastic chair. That did it. He rubbed his eyes, still lying on the floor, and mumbled: "Miura, what is it? It's two in the morning," he said in a tired voice. Actually, it came out a bit less clear than that. It seemed more to Ana that he had said: "Mirawasisit? Isstooinnamornin". He had a thick British accent, which didn't make it any easier to discern.

But Miura understood fine: "Wake up, Oliver. There's a tester here who needs a scan. You know the goddamn motto: Science never rests, you dolt. Now make yourself useful and tell me where Mac is," she said harshly. Ana found this an odd way for Miura to talk to a man who could easily be twenty years her senior, but Oliver didn't seem to notice.

"Mac went home two hours ago, Miura, he was finished with whatever he was doing. Some teapot thing. You're lucky I'm still here," he said. He stood up and brushed himself off, then spoke again: "You want me to boot up the computer? Can't it... wait?" he asked. "She's got no instructions on her, otherwise it could," Miura said in a biting voice. Ana just sat there, viewing it all. The man turned to her. "Eh, hello. I'm Oliver. I'm sorry if I'm a bit distracted, I just woke up from a sound sleep, which I suppose you saw," he said sheepishly. Ana simply nodded. "Just, eh, sit down there. This'll only hurt a second. I think," said Oliver. Reviewing her options, Ana decided the best one was to comply. The computer switched on, with the blank white screen glowing in the darkness, Oliver pulled an odd looking device out of a drawer in the worn metal desk. He held it over Ana's arm for a moment. A sort of laser began emanating from it. She felt a sharp sting. The screen remained blank, except for one thing: A name. Liesel Tanner. Ana, or rather Liesel, felt certain it was hers. Oliver looked confused, as though he had expected something else to happen. "That's it?" he said incredulously, unable to hide his surprise. "What's it?" questioned Miura, leaning over to look at the computer. "That... is it," Oliver said. Miura's mouth dropped open.

"Oh, crap. What are we supposed to do in this situation?" said Miura. Oliver responded: "Well, I do believe we can ask Mac for a second scan on his computer, and if it happens again, we can make an appointment with Dr. Redford." Miura shrugged. "Well, she'll have to stay overnight. One of the rooms has an extra bed, she can stay in the student's quarters." Liesel thought it best not to say anything. Miura went over to Liesel and said: "Well, Liesel, you'll be staying here at least overnight. So don't leave your room, don't bother anyone, there'll be food for breakfast in a mini-fridge in the room. Eat that, I don't care if it's cold. You will have two roommates, do not bother them, they have class, and they'll leave for class, you don't have any classes, so stay in your room." Miura guided Liesel out of the doors, down a few hallways, and to a corridor with at least a hundred doors. She gestured for Liesel to go in one of them, and she did. What else would she do? To her surprise, there were two children about her age, a boy and a girl, sleeping on two of the three beds in the room. The third bed was already made up, and looked like no one had slept in it for quite a while. As promised, there was a mini-fridge in the corner, and on the other side of the room, there was an old wooden desk with a stack of papers that for some reason also had a cash

register on it. Miura hissed quietly: "Ignore them. Just get in bed, don't wake anyone up." Liesel decided it would be best not to openly defy Miura, who wielded power at least over Oliver. She got into bed and squeezed her eyes shut. But she didn't sleep very well that night.

Liesel woke up that day not feeling very rested, but remembering her instructions. The two people she had seen in the room the night before were gone, which disappointed her, but she knew it would make it easier to go unnoticed, which seemed to have been Miura's intention. She remembered that there was food in the fridge. She opened the door and found an unappetizing egg sandwich. It looked a bit dry, and of course it was ice cold, but it was food, and Liesel knew she probably hadn't eaten in quite some time. Finding herself very hungry at this thought, she devoured the sandwich and proceeded to take a look at her surroundings. She decided to leave the cash register alone. The papers too, seemed like they might be private. She turned her head. There were the three beds she had seen before, hers had gray bedding, the others had lavender and bright blue. The lavender bed was covered in stuffed animals and books. Liesel, in her boredom, counted the stuffed animals. Four bears, two elephants, three cats, two dogs, a rabbit, and a squirrel. She examined the books, deciding she would read one to pass the time. Three trashy romance novels, a set of schoolbooks, a finance magazine, and a "Learn to Knit" book. Two knitting needles and a small ball of orange yarn sat next to it. After a bit of consideration, Liesel settled on one of the romance novels, thinking that despite the fact that the contents of the book were probably not much in terms of quality, it would burn more time, being the thickest of any of the books besides the schoolbooks, which Liesel wasn't sure could hold her attention.

She picked up "Tales of Love Lost" and began to read: "Amoura's thick, glossy, russet hair gleamed gold in the sunlight as she looked into her lover's face. Her deep emerald eyes glowed with the passion she felt for him. Her skin was like silk to his touch, his firm, warming, touch. She gazed at his opulent cerulean eyes, his shimmering raven hair slightly ruffled by the wind. But alas, such beauty cannot last forever. She whispered his name as she was forced away from her true love: 'Desiro. I love you.' Despite their passion, the duration of their love was doomed to be- "Liesel? Are you in there? Quit wasting time and hurry up!" Miura's voice interrupted the sweet parting of Amoura and Desiro, forcing Liesel back into reality.

"I got you an appointment with Dr. Redford. If you miss it, I'm dead! And by extension, you'll be dead too," she said. "Why?" said Liesel, though she already knew the answer. "Because if I get in trouble, I'm going to kill you!" responded Miura, rather predictably. She then repeated what she had done last night: dragged Liesel down the hall. Again, her feet slid on the aluminum tiles. But this time she could hear talking, voices through the walls, making a contrast to the near silence of the previous night. They came to the same metal door. It seemed less towering, less intimidating, in the daylight. This time, the key card worked on the first try. Miura spoke then: "Redford agreed to do a second scan herself. She had no appointment waiting, for once. Of course, when I need to talk to her she's never... her computer might be more accurate than Mac's anyway. His isn't built for that," she muttered. It sounded more like Miura was talking to herself more than Liesel, for she had not bothered to explain anything. Liesel wished that she had more information, she could barely even guess as to what was going on. They came to the same set of doors as before. Miura faltered, as though she wasn't sure of which door she wanted. Her eyes finally fell upon one of the doors with a keycard slot. It was made of a dark wood, with a shiny brass handle. Miura pulled another key card out of her pocket and slid it into the slot.

She turned the doorknob and in they went. The floors were the same aluminum tiling as the rest of the building, but the walls were done in a more tasteful shade of pink, not the loud color that was found in the hallways. There was an electronic clock, with the time displayed to be 10:30 a.m., and there were six metal folding chairs against the wall. Miura unfolded one and sat down, and Liesel did the same. They sat in silence for a minute, both staring at the clock. After fifteen minutes or so, Liesel's chair started vibrating, making a loud buzzing noise.

"Does that mean I should go in?" asked Liesel. Miura simply nodded. Liesel swung open the door, not knowing what awaited her. She stepped into the office, almost gagging on the scent of the cloying air freshener. She looked behind her. Miura was gone. The place was so unlike Oliver's shabby office, everything was surgically clean, and looked sparkling new. A service robot was flitting around, dusting this and that. Liesel blinked, regaining her focus. She looked and saw a thin woman with auburn hair, sitting in a swivel chair in front of a large, impressive computer. This must be the Dr. Redford she had been sent to see. She swiveled around to face Liesel.

"Hello, you must be Liesel," she said calmly. All Liesel could get out was a stuttering: "Eh..."

h-hello." Redford replied with a simple: "Sit down," gesturing to a chair next to her. Liesel complied, while thinking that she had been doing so a lot lately. The people she had met seemed like people it would be logical to comply with. Being disagreeable wouldn't have gotten her anywhere in her previous situations, and certainly not in this one, where there was a woman who seemed infinitely more powerful than Oliver, and even Miura. Dr. Redford pulled out the same sort of device Oliver had had. From what Liesel had overheard, she was going to repeat the same process as last night, to check for error. Whatever the results had been, they had surprised Miura and Oliver, enough for them to think it a mistake. But Liesel had a theory, that the scan wasn't wrong, that it all had something to do with her missing memory. She hoped this might explain things, finally. The laser light flashed, and Liesel's arm stung. And just a name came up. Again. Liesel Tanner, there was no mistake. No mistake. Liesel Tanner. It echoed in her head. The world felt like it was spinning. Last night, she had been tired, confused. But today, the revelation came at full force. A name. That was all she had in the world.

Redford spoke again: "Where are you from? Do you remember?"

Liesel didn't want to tell her, didn't want to admit, but somehow the word slipped out of her mouth anyway: "No." She nodded, as though that checked out, like that made sense. Liesel suddenly felt a burning feeling, hatred, or maybe just embarrassment. Because Dr. Redford, who seemed to know everything, while Liesel knew nothing, she could keep talking that way, so smooth, so unaffected while Liesel's life fell apart. "Did you know your name before coming here?"

More questions, but this time Liesel was prepared for it. "No, ma'am."

"Do you remember anything at all?" Redford responded.

It was all Liesel could do to keep herself from crying: "N-no. Except for..."

"Basic knowledge, yes. That's... standard. But this isn't such a standard situation. Excuse me a moment," Dr. Redford said, nodding briskly. She grabbed the service robot, held it to her ear, and began speaking into it: "I

think we have a Case 23."

Then came the response: "It's probably just 23-norm," said a strange, metallic voice.

"No, not norm. I think we have a rogue wiper," Redford said, just barely retaining her cool tone. "Could it be... 23-natural?"

"In all seriousness, do you think that's the case? The chances are one in over eight billion, it's complete loss. And her chip is wiped, and in addition, why on earth would she be here of all places," Redford said, with a slight tone of exasperation.

"Well, I was just grasping at straws. The affected will have to stay until we can place them," the voice responded.

"I know, but it's practically airtight. I explained this, her chip is wiped," Dr. Redford said, regaining her composure.

"Well, if it's the only option..."

"It is."

"Fine. Tell her."

Then Dr. Redford turned towards Liesel, and commenced speaking. "You'll be with us for a while. You will remain in the room where you have been staying, and as for school, you will be permitted to learn here. This building is not just what you have seen of it, it is a school as well. An unorthodox school, an advanced one, but a school nonetheless. It goes from middle school to high school, but lacks the usual heavy schedule of a school, as our curriculum is dissimilar to the norm. Putting that aside, you have lost your memory. Or rather, had it taken from you. We at this research center, and some others, are in possession of a drug that can remove memory. The memory is not really gone, with certain triggers it can be restored, but we have no idea what these might be for you. Any questions?" Liesel contemplated saying no, but in fact she did have a question, and decided that it would do her more good to ask it then to lie.

"Just two," she said. "What were those scans for?"

Dr. Redford replied, saying: "This is gross oversimplification, but let's just say that everyone in the country has one small computer chip implanted in them at birth. It doesn't contain much personal information, just your name, place of residence, and your health record. It could have been used to identify you. But it was wiped, all except for your name. What was your other question?"

This one, with its bluntness, required some audacity from Liesel: "I want to know what Miura thought I was doing out there on the doorstep, why she brought me inside," asked Liesel.

Redford frowned. "I can't answer that question. Go meet 667450-1, she'll give you a tour, I posted her outside the door a while ago," she said. She guided Liesel out of a back door, just as Liesel was wondering what she could have meant by that number, and there waiting outside was a strange looking robot. Liesel had seen such things often, she remembered now, with the service or maintenance robots cleaning shopping malls or picking up trash. Sometimes people had a self-moving vacuum cleaner, or a robotic pet of some kind. This thing had made her remember, somehow. Then, the robot did something else: spoke.

"Hi, I'm Yarrow! Actually, my name is a bunch of weird numbers and stuff that I can't remember. But I call myself Yarrow, 'cause that's what Mac calls me, and you can call me Yarrow too!" Liesel took in the strange sight of the robot. She (for she had a very feminine voice, and a very human-sounding one too. Thus, it seemed inappropriate to Liesel to think of her as "it".) was at least six feet tall, plated with some shiny metal, her joints were purple silicon rubber, she had some sort of gun attached to one arm, and a video screen on her face with a sort of animated line on it that served as a mouth. All this would have looked imposing, even a bit threatening, had she not had large, cartoonish eyes with large, shiny pupils and yellow irises, and a frilly pink apron. Never before had Liesel seen a robot like this. Yarrow continued on with her cheery dialogue: "I'm supposed to give you the grand tour of this place! Except the part you're not supposed to see... oops, shouldn't have said that! Ah well, who cares! So here we have this lovely hallway, oh, and here are some excellent doors..." Liesel stopped listening as Yarrow began to describe the woodwork on said doors. Once they left the general area of the doors, they saw the classrooms (they went inside an empty one), the cafeteria, the gym (which was quite large and impressive, with a swimming pool), the rec room, the outdoor yard, the bedrooms, and several janitor's closets and storage rooms which Yarrow insisted on looking in, and a number of other things. Eventually, Liesel was dropped in the

WHERE ARE
YOU FROM?

DO YOU
REMEMBER?

lunchroom where the students were eating their lunches. She went up to the trays and loaded it up. She took a slice of pizza, a chocolate milk and a small bowl of raspberries. She picked a table and sat down.

Most of the kids just kept chattering and eating, but the two nearest to Liesel turned and looked at her. There was a skinny, sandy-haired boy with blue eyes, and a short, tan girl with glasses. The girl looked over at her.

“What’s your name, are you a student?” she said.

“Yes, my name’s Liesel. Yours?” Liesel answered.

The girl responded that her name was Beryl, and then Beryl turned over to the boy.

“Hey, John, this is Liesel,” she said, waving a hand in front of his face. John shrugged his shoulders, muttered a hello and kept eating with a deadpan expression on his face. “Sorry, he’s not very friendly,” said Beryl, smiling at Liesel. Then, her face took on a questioning expression, and she asked: “Do you know about the student tokens?” Liesel looked sheepish, answering no. “Well, I kind of own a bank for those, I’ve got a cash register and all. I can loan you some tokens. You can use them to buy drinks and stuff for the mini fridge, and if you save up enough, you can buy a prize! John worked super hard last year, and he worked up enough to get the GameMachine 3. It comes with a couple games. John’s been playing the farming sim pretty much non-stop.”

John mumbled again. “I wish you wouldn’t tell people that,” he said.

Liesel felt that she ought to answer him: “It’s all right, we all like rubbish like that,” she told him. “Yeah, I guess,” he muttered. Beryl looked at her watch.

“Well, I think we should maybe go to class now,” she said.

John pulled a schedule out of his backpack and groaned: “Oh god, we’ve got Mr. Pearson.”

Liesel felt compelled to ask: “What’s wrong with Mr. Pearson?”

“He’s a terrible teacher, you’ll see when you go in his class. If you’ve got the same lunch period, you’re probably with us,” she said. Liesel followed Beryl and John down the hall, and after a few false turns, they arrived at their destination. Sitting at the head of the table in the classroom was Oliver. He waved at Liesel, then began speaking.

“Well, eh... you’re here, and... it’s a class... am I supposed to be teaching... I don’t... take out your notebooks and pencils! It’s...eh... art class! Yeah, art class. So, just, eh, do some drawing. Okay.” Oliver put his feet on the table and opened a book. Liesel wasn’t much of

an artist, so she just sort of scribbled in her notebook for a while. “Well, that’s about the minimum class time, so I think you’re done here. Go away! No, sorry, I’m bad with children. But, eh, just leave. Now. I suppose.” They went on to other classes, some long, some short, some interesting, some insufferably dull. Gym was particularly grueling, and Liesel realized she was particularly un-athletic. She couldn’t run far without getting cramps. A memory flashed through her mind then, vivid as though it were happening right at the moment. She was running down the sidewalk, sweating.

“Hey, wait up Demitri!” she shouted. Who was Demitri? Liesel flashed back into the present, sitting in her math class. “What is the square root of fifteen to the third?” She was distracted by the memory, and unfortunately could not remember the answer. Luckily, she was not asked for. Other classes went by, but Liesel drifted through them. Finally, when the last class, literary analysis, ended, she caught up with Beryl and John. Beryl grabbed Liesel’s hand. “Come on, I’m going to loan you some tokens,” she said, grinning. Liesel followed her haplessly, to what she recognized as her room. Beryl led her in. The cash register must be hers, Liesel thought.

Beryl went over to it, suddenly business like. She opened the drawer, and pulled out a bag of shiny metal tokens. She counted them, then handed them to Liesel.

“A hundred, okay? You can use them to buy snacks, there’s not enough here for a prize. Pay it all back, or I’ll get you!” Liesel took the bag.

“Where do I buy items?” she asked.

“Counter in the lunchroom, right after the food. Now where’s your room? You should keep these safe,” said Beryl.

“In here, actually.” answered Liesel.

“Well, okay. John’s in here too,” said Beryl, smiling.

“So what do we do now?” asked Liesel.

“We go to the rec room,” said Beryl. Liesel followed Beryl out the door. They walked down the wall and

down a flight of stairs. After a while, they reached a door labeled “Recreational Room”. Liesel opened the door. Put simply, it was complete pandemonium. Children were running around shrieking, doing various things. In another room, there was a holographic screen blaring. There was a table with a line of MagNet® computers, all with kids playing on them. There was a group of kids playing laser tag. And then there was Beryl, John, and a tall blonde girl, sitting calmly on a couch. Liesel decided to join them, not being the running-and-screaming type. She sat down, and the blonde girl introduced herself.

“Hi, I’m April.” She promptly pulled out a computer tablet and proceeded to ignore Liesel. Liesel was fine with this, and simply grabbed a book off a nearby shelf and started reading. This went on for quite some time, a couple times Liesel got up and played on the computer when one was vacated. Liesel didn’t feel worried, she almost felt bored. But she didn’t have a problem with that. Although there was the noise, Liesel felt she finally had some peace. Suddenly, the door swung open, and slammed. Some people turned their heads to look, but promptly returned to their various entertainments. But Liesel felt that this might concern her, so she continued her focus. It turned out that Yarrow of all people (or rather, robots) burst into the room, holding a metallic pink suitcase. A suitcase with Liesel’s name on it, written sloppily in permanent marker. She threw it at Liesel, whipping it towards her.

“This is for you! Y’know, since you don’t have any stuff!” Yarrow said in a cheerful voice. Unfortunately, the aforementioned suitcase continued on its path towards Liesel and hit her square in the face. Liesel promptly decided that she hated that stupid, perky, incredibly annoying robot. Yarrow. She ran out of the room, her face red with tears, embarrassment, and blood from where the apparently sharp-edged suitcase had hit her. Not only did it have a metallic sheen, it was actually a metallic material, and thus Liesel was badly bruised. She ran to her room, head throbbing and tears in her eyes. She shoved her face into a pillow, staining the pillow brown with a drip of dried blood. “Just when things had begun to take on some semblance of normality, a robot had to show up and hit me in the head with a fricking suitcase,” thought Liesel. After she composed herself enough to actually look inside the suitcase, she found there was some simple clothing and a few sets of pajamas. There were also toiletries, including a toothbrush, soap, a washrag, and all those sorts of things. There was also a map of the rather enormous and winding school. Liesel noted that it didn’t contain any of the offices she had visited. Nearby though, there was a shower room.

Liesel decided that she would try and wash some of the dried blood off her face, and try to clean up in general. She grabbed a toothbrush, toothpaste, a nightgown to change into (for it was now late enough for pajamas) and her soap. Liesel stumbled out the door and down the hall, following the map until she reached her destination. Seeing no one, she stripped off her clothes, stepped into the shower and turned on the hot water. At first, it stung terribly, but the pain soon dulled, and with the blood wiped off, Liesel realized it had all come from a few rather small nicks on her face. She did however, have a nasty black eye, the suitcase had really been quite heavy. The hot water warmed her, and made her sleepy, and after washing herself, she found herself sinking to the wet, slippery tiled floor. She traced the pattern with her hands, almost drifting off in the warm water. She could have sat there like that forever, had a familiar shrill voice not interrupted her peace. Yarrow’s voice.

“Hey, um, Liesel? I’m real sorry. For, y’know, hitting you in the head. I actually have, like, serious issues with my programing. There was an accident, and I had to have part of my central processor removed.” Liesel hadn’t realized this, that there was something... wrong. With Yarrow. It provided at least the necessary justification for hitting Liesel with a large piece of metal. But Liesel didn’t give the appropriate, open response. “Yeah. Okay,” she muttered, without a hint of apology. But she was a little sorry. A little, for thinking what she did about Yarrow. But only a little bit. Forgiveness did not come naturally to Liesel. It never had.

Liesel remembered something, just a tiny fraction of an experience. “Fine then, be a dumb jerk! I don’t need you! I hate you!” She had been much younger, she was sure, but she remembered it, clear as day. What she had said then, so long ago. She walked out of the shower and wrapped herself in a towel. She pulled on her nightgown, white and soft, and looked at herself in the mirror. White-blond hair, light green eyes and a thin, pale, face. She realized, with a jolt, that before she had looked in the mirror she had forgotten her own face. She brushed her teeth, rinsed, spit, and walked down to bed. It had been a long day. She woke up to John poking her, and whispering.

“Hey. Wake up,” he said. Liesel stirred, and rubbed her eyes. She laid in bed for a moment, then sat up. She opened the suitcase Yarrow had thrown at her last night. Inside she found an assortment of clothes. Liesel picked out a maroon shirt with blue stripes on the sleeves, a pair of jeans, and some fresh underwear and socks. She put on her shoes from yesterday. She took a good look at them for the first time. They were white, still new enough not to have turned

HEY.
WAKE UP.

brown with dirt. They had blue tongues, and toes, and black laces. She borrowed Beryl's comb, and tried to pull the snarls out of her hair. It worked, mostly, and she blindly followed John and Beryl out to class. They went to their class, and another, and another. It all felt like... business as usual. Already. After classes, she went down to the rec room, and slammed square into a girl walking up the stairs. She stood up, but instead of apologizing and walking away, she smiled at Liesel and said: "Oh hi! I never met you before! Are you a new student?"

For some reason, this annoyed Liesel. She just wanted time to think. She just muttered a yes, and shoved past the girl, who looked down at her from the top of the stairs, apparently unfazed, and yelled: "My name is Rylie!"

Liesel ended up running back upstairs, as the rec room was much too loud for thinking. When she got there, Rylie was gone. Breathing a sigh of relief, she ran to her room, and slammed the door. Why did everything have to be so confusing? She had lost everything, and people wouldn't stop poking their noses in where they didn't belong. She didn't think of it as rude that she had shoved the girl, that she had rejected her without even a word. She knew she ought to think it was wrong, but she justified it every time the thought came up. What did they care, what did they know? Nothing, she thought. Maybe there was some small piece in her mind, yelling at her, berating her, telling her over and over she should be sorry.

But Liesel was deaf to the pleas from the last reasonable part of her brain. Everything was blocked by solid emotion, solid anger and pain from her problems, her own personal issues. Why should she care? They didn't know. The next days passed in a blur. She didn't pay attention to anything. Oh, she would act the part, with Beryl, with John. Otherwise, she'd be all alone. She didn't want that, not really. But Rylie, Liesel felt she was always telling Rylie to shove off, to go away, that she didn't get it, didn't understand. Subtly implying, she'd make remarks that meant Rylie wasn't worth her time. She wasn't sure why, but the sight of that girl brought bile to her throat. Maybe she was just a painful reminder, of the time that Liesel broke down. Or maybe Liesel just didn't like her, the way she always had a smile for everyone. Liesel hated those types of people, so full to the brim with love of the world. As far as she was concerned the world was too... too ruined to deserve "love".

She remembered something then, something from before: "Why do you always smile, Diane? It's disturbing. You'd probably smile at my funeral."

Liesel heard a response, from an unknown voice:

"Why do you always say things like that, Liesel? It creeps me out!" Alone in the hallway, Liesel crumpled to the floor. Who were these people that she saw? What was her past? How could she think to just leave it behind? There were people out there, people who knew her. Maybe a family who wanted her back. She wished she had people who knew her, really knew her, had shared their lives with her. But she didn't, because someone had taken it all away. And in that one, depressed, angry moment, Liesel decided she had to find out who. And she would start right here. But she couldn't keep it a secret. She couldn't do it alone. She needed someone to help.

One day, she went to her room, jingling her unspent tokens in her pocket. She opened the door, and as she had hoped, there sat John. Beryl must be in the rec room with her banking business, Liesel thought.

She cleared her throat, feeling rather stupid, and spoke: "John, don't laugh. There's something I have to tell you." And she talked, and talked and talked about the memory wipe. And for some reason, John believed her. He told her to meet him in the front yard after classes. She agreed. She didn't care at all that she barely knew him, didn't stop to think that she didn't even know his last name. People often do unstable things under duress, and this was one of these.

Then one day, unexpectedly, she was summoned to see Dr. Redford. This had to be important. Liesel's mind raced. Maybe they had found something out, maybe... Liesel was something of a pessimist, and she wouldn't complete that sentence. False hope. She was pulled aside after gym class by Miura. They had been doing tumbling. By the end, Liesel's head ached something horrible, and she was rather dizzy from all the rolling. Miura had literally grabbed her, and told her in an oddly resentful voice that she had to go see Dr. Redford. She dragged Liesel down the hall, for what seemed like the umpteenth time. Miura walked Liesel through the various doors, unlocking them when necessary. Finally they came to the waiting room.

The service robot Liesel had seen on her previous trip to the office of Dr. Redford opened the door and gestured towards her. Miura walked out, and Liesel went in. The air freshener was a different scent this time, though the smell was equally repellent and chemical. Dr. Redford indicated a chair, and Liesel sat down.

"Liesel, take this. It's a clearance patch, and will allow you to visit my office when necessary. Just show this to any of the maintenance robots and they can guide you through to my office, instead of you disrupting the people working here. You are now dismissed. Go out through the back door," Redford said quietly. Liesel was disappointed with the

lack of a breakthrough. She was glad she hadn't dared to hope too much. That day, after class, she met John out in the front yard, and she had brought two cans of grape soda that she had spent most of her tokens on. He gestured to a small wooden climbing structure, and climbed up to the highest step, among some tree branches. She went up after him, asking "Why are we up here?" "So no one can hear us," replied John. Liesel nodded. She popped her grape soda can, and offered one to John. He opened his drink, and then started talking: "Liesel, you need to go talk to Miura. She knows more than you think. I can't tell you anything here, it's still not private enough, even though most people aren't out here, they're watching the... spectacle out back. That's all then. Goodbye, Liesel."

He climbed out of the tree, and Liesel followed.

Then she went to see what the "spectacle out back" was.

There was a crowd of kids, shouting... and there were five people wrestling on top of a set of monkey bars. Beryl was standing outside the crowd, and she appeared to be taking bets with tokens. The first thought that came to her mind was: "God, these people are starved for entertainment." The second was: "I think the one with the cornrows is winning." She went to Beryl, pulled her few remaining tokens out of her pocket and bet on the boy she had noticed, whose name had turned out to be Noah. Apparently, the game went like this: Whoever was not pushed off of the bars won.

"It's the championship," said Beryl, "it's between Noah, Rita, April, Corry and Dean. April took a hit to the face, was shoved off, and hit the ground painfully. It looked like she had a black eye. But April walked away silently, back indoors to wash up. Dean, a tall, weedy boy was tripped by Noah, who then shoved him face first off the bars. He pushed himself up, and staggered away, his hands covering a bloody nose. The combatants left other than Noah were Rita and Corry. Rita was a black-haired girl who wore tons of eye makeup, despite being only a year older than Liesel, at thirteen. She had a tank top on over a ripped up shirt, and had spiked black hair. She was rather threatening, suffice to say. Corry was a rather stump-like boy with uneven red hair wearing an LED T-shirt. He seemed too utterly stolid to be shoved off. Liesel took a closer look at Noah, and saw that he was the oldest fighter, maybe fourteen. He wore a plain black thermal underwear shirt and gray jeans, and he dwarfed Corry, who was only twelve.

Noah grabbed Rita by the arm, and he flung her

off the bars. She managed to actually hold on, starting to pull herself up. Then Noah stepped on her fingers. She was in a position to land on her feet, but her fingers seemed bloodied and stiff. God, what was Noah wearing on his feet? Spikes? She tried to smile as she walked away, but everyone could see her wincing. It seemed like Noah had it then, and he moved to flip Corry off the bars. Then Corry kicked him in the stomach. He doubled up for only a moment, but Corry capitalized on it and hit him in the face when Noah was closer to him, for just a moment. Noah was regaining himself though, and he was much, much taller. He flicked Corry off like a bug. Corry landed on his back, but got up quickly and ran, holding his head. Liesel collected on her bet, doubling her tokens.

Then she ran indoors, remembering John's telling her to see Miura.

Thinking she should look for her in one of the rooms past the metal door, she went to the nearest maintenance robot: Yarrow. When she showed her the clearance patch, Yarrow dragged her down the hall, like Miura had done. Unable to break free from Yarrow's grasp, all Liesel could think was: "Is that standard protocol here?" They came to the metal door, and Yarrow got them through it. Liesel looked at the doors. One was Dr. Redford's office. Miura probably wasn't in there. There were no voices coming from Oliver's office. Liesel simply chose blindly, and looked at a door that needed a security card. Yarrow pointed out she only had clearance for Redford's office. Liesel told her to shut up and give her the card. For some reason, Yarrow complied.

"Um... why not? Well, there are a lot of reasons why not, because actually-PROGRAMMING ERROR," said Yarrow. Liesel took the clearance card, let herself in and... there was an enormous room, the walls lined with what looked like... USB sticks? She spotted Miura at a counter next to a door, packing a picnic basket.

For a moment, Liesel thought she hadn't been seen, then Miura turned towards her: "What are you doing here?" Liesel realized that she had no pretext of any kind, and decided to pretend she knew what she was doing.

"Can I ask you a question?"

Miura responded: "You just did."

Liesel, irked by this, replied: "Can I ask you another one?"

Miura snorted. "You've done that too," she said. Liesel decided to take a more direct approach to talk to Miura.

"What are you doing with that picnic basket? Shouldn't you be working?" Miura looked at Liesel like she was an spider she was considering squashing.

“Who are you to ask that? And besides, it’s not for me,” she said.

“Who is it for?” asked Liesel. “Your Aunt Bertha,” Miura responded, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

“I don’t have an Aunt Bertha,” Liesel said in a similar tone.

Miura leaned right in her face and said: “How do you know?”

Liesel bit her lip, and said: “What I really need to know is why you’re arguing with a twelve-year-old.”

Miura blinked, muttered “God, I hate you Lucien,” and opened the door for Liesel, picnic basket in hand. Inside was a room much like the one Liesel was staying in, only larger, and somewhat more decrepit. There were four beds and a table. The walls had peeling wallpaper in an eye-scorching shade of pink, and there was a bare light-bulb dangling from the ceiling. But what caught Liesel’s attention the most were the four people in the room.

One was an black-haired girl perhaps a year or two older than Liesel wearing the same fuchsia uniform as Miura. Another was an extremely short, skinny boy who looked like he hadn’t slept in a week. There was a blonde girl of about nine wearing a short, pale pink nightgown. And then there was the fourth resident of the room, an admittedly odd sight. It was a tall girl in her late teens wearing an enormous turquoise nightgown that practically engulfed her. She had long, yellowish blond hair that hung in bunches. The tips of each of these were dyed black, giving her the appearance of having a multitude of yellow-and-black foxes sitting on her head. The girl in the pink nightgown sat up in bed briefly, smiled feebly and waved. Liesel noticed as the girl turned towards her that one of her eyes was fogged up. Liesel considered that perhaps she was blind in that eye.

Miura broke the silence then, saying briskly to Liesel: “The younger girl is Maribeth, the older girl is Akon, the boy is Octavian, and the one in the uniform is Octavia.

“No relation whatsoever,” Octavian and Octavia said in perfect unison.

Maribeth sat up again, saying: “What did you bring this time, Miura?”

“Bologna sandwiches,” replied Miura. Maribeth stuck her tongue out.

“I hate bologna!” she yelled in a reedy voice.

Miura smiled, warmly. “Well, you won’t get any chocolate then. I brought a little.” Maribeth frowned, but then shrugged as Miura handed her the sandwich and a juice box. Octavian and Akon accepted their food wordlessly, but Octavia refused her cellophane-wrapped sandwich.

“I’m a vegetarian, moron.” Miura frowned,

contemplating this for a moment. Then she ripped the sandwich out of the cellophane and violently pulled out the bologna and shoved it in her mouth.

“Fine. Meat’s expensive anyway, so you can just have lettuce,” said Miura. Octavia looked like she was about to turn down the sandwich, perhaps on account of the meat having touched it. But then a look of resignation came across her face and she ate the sandwich. Liesel thought for a moment about the difference in the way Miura treated Maribeth and Octavia. There was a warmth in her with Maribeth that Liesel had never seen. She had thought of Miura as rather... abrupt, at best. At worst, mocking. But there was actually something bracing in her hardness to Octavia, to Liesel too, like she saw them as equals, rather than people who had to be taken care of. There was a long silence while everyone but Liesel (who had already had dinner) ate.

Then Octavian saw fit to break it, by saying “This juice box is really... good. Is it a different kind? Uh...” Like all awkward comments, it was followed by an awkward silence, until Akon spoke up.

“Juice boxes are only momentary pleasures. They’re not really what you want. Nobody really gets what they want. And everyone dies,” Akon said glumly. It was such a ridiculously fatalistic and random comment Liesel thought she must have been joking. But no one was laughing, least of all Akon. Her face was grim, and serious, and so it remained. No one really talked after that. Just sat in silence. Then the lights turned out, and Miura ushered Liesel out.

“So now you know one more thing about this place. But there’s... some other people you need to meet. Orders from Dr. Lucien. You don’t want to meet him.” Liesel was slightly mystified by this, but decided to take things as they came. Miura pointed to a door, and Liesel opened it. Liesel felt like she was always opening doors, and each one held a story more confusing than the last. But she opened this one, hoping to finally find some answers, instead of questions that she couldn’t really fathom, or people she couldn’t trust. She looked in, and saw a young man, barely older than Miura and a young woman about the same age. The young woman was welding what looked like small metal legs, and her colleague was putting wires and computer chips into what looked like... a tea cup.

“Is the walking rig about done, Violet?” he called.

**THIS JUICE
BOX IS REALLY**

“Nearly, Mac. I need to put on the meld-nano transmitters so they attach right.” said Violet.

“Okay, I need to attach the eyes anyway. Oh, Miura.

Didn’t hear you there, usually when you come in you start yelling at me,” said Mac.

Miura turned to Liesel, saying: “This is Mac, and his girlfriend Violet. They’re a brilliant programmer and an amazing builder, but they waste their time on junk like that.” She pointed to the now completed teacup robot, which had large, bright eyes, metal legs, and plenty of computer hardware covered by a waterproof partition. It was a feat of technology. And it was a walking teacup.

“Teapot!” Mac called. A teapot, with pink porcelain matching that of the tea cup jumped off its shelf and walked up to him. It made an endearing whistling sound, and several other walking teacups bounced off their shelves onto the table.

“Now we’ve got a full set. Teapot, pour,” said Violet in a satisfied voice. The teapot hopped about, pouring tea into all the teacups, who smiled with their large, cartoonish eyes and purred. A little pink sugar bowl stumbled off its shelf, and Mac caught it.

“I think this one needs leg repairs,” he said. He sat the sugar bowl down on the table, and it seemed to turn a brighter pink, as though it was blushing with embarrassment.

“Like that? It’s a new feature,” said Mac, as the sugar bowl used its little metal arms to scoop sugar. Liesel was incredibly impressed by this display, and quietly sat sipping her tea.

No one spoke for a moment, then Violet looked at Liesel and said: “We plan on making a whole set of robotic dish ware in the same style. What’s your name?”

“Liesel Tanner,” mumbled Liesel.

Miura said: “She’s the... Lucien said she could come here.”

Mac nodded. “Wasn’t Yarrow supposed to prevent anyone getting in without clearance? Nothing... happened... right?” he asked.

“Your dumb robot glitched up and let the kid in without clearance. But no, she didn’t shoot or bomb anything.” Violet and Mac both breathed a sigh of relief.

“Good. I don’t want a repeat of the supermarket incident. That poor clerk...” said Violet. Liesel made a mental note to keep her distance from Yarrow, or at least try to. Miura slipped something into Liesel’s pocket. Liesel opened her mouth as if to talk, but then promptly shut it again. When they all finished their tea, Liesel was escorted back to her room, where John was sitting. “Where were

you after dinner? Did you find Miura?” he asked. And Liesel decided that there needed to be someone who knew what she knew, even if it was another kid she’d just met. So she told John everything she had seen. Everything she had experienced was disjointed, bizarre. But the way John talked, the way he said things in his quiet voice, for a few minutes in Liesel’s messed-up life, things made sense. Then Beryl came in, and it stopped making sense.

“Liesel, where have you been? Honestly, I want to know. You’ve been virtually gone except during classes! You weren’t in the rec room, you weren’t here... it’s scaring me. I’m not an idiot, something’s wrong, Liesel Tanner.” Beryl said this so forcefully, it simply confused Liesel. Beryl hadn’t struck her as a forceful girl, or a girl who knew... people. Liesel did not know people. She could never tell when something was “wrong”, or when someone was making a joke. She always ended up laughing last, laughing awkwardly. And awkward was a good description for Liesel at the moment. Because Beryl knew just a little too much.

Liesel was also a very bad liar, and she realized that “Shut up, nothing, go away,” wasn’t going to work here. But what was she supposed to do? Tell the truth? That would be less believable than a lie. Beryl persisted, and Liesel froze like a deer in headlights.

“Well, I... I’ve been doing remedial classes?” Liesel said unsteadily. Beryl frowned.

“I don’t believe that. You’re a horrid liar, Liesel,” she said.

John stepped in then: “She has, it’s true, I’ve seen her working on it,” he said. For a moment, Liesel was relieved.

Then Beryl spoke again: “This school doesn’t have remedial classes, and you know it. It’s not a public school, you have to take a test to get in. You could as soon get kicked out as take remedial classes. Now what’s the truth?” she said. Only one thought was in Liesel’s mind then, and it is necessary to censor it, as it was extremely profane.

...GOOD.

And Liesel gave an honest answer: “I can’t tell you.” Beryl just gave her a disappointed look.

“Fine, be like that,” she said. Liesel had another thought then: “Fantastic, now she hates me.”

She flopped down on the bed, and before John even opened his mouth, Liesel said: “Leave me alone.” John shrugged and walked out. For a moment, Liesel wished he hadn’t, that he had stayed to talk to her. It passed. She turned off the lights, fell asleep in her clothes, and when she woke up it was morning. John roused her, and she put on a pink sweater and a striped skirt. Then she pulled on her sneakers, without putting on socks. After class, she ran smack into Rylie, whom she hadn’t been bothered by in a while, and had almost forgotten. Liesel remembered their last encounter then. Rylie had offered Liesel a cupcake, and Liesel had walked right past, while Rylie called to her. This time, Rylie had a soda.

“You want some? I have extra,” she said. For Liesel, that was somehow the breakingpoint.

“Listen,” she said, “I don’t like you. I never did. I don’t want you around, you’re obnoxious and creepy, and you smile too much. Every time I see you, I want to punch you in the face. Get the picture, you dimwit? No, I don’t want any.” Rylie, instead of shrugging and smiling as usual, frowned. Her dark skin prevented her from turning red, but Liesel could feel the white-hot hatred radiating off her all the same.

“You know what, Liesel?” she said, “If that’s what you think of me, then fine. You know what else, Liesel? Nobody likes you. I was nice to you, tried to be nice to you, because I pitied you. You treat me like I’m a moron, and I’m not. I am here, is that not enough for you?! What do I need to do to prove it to you?! Take a fricking test?! Well, I don’t need your goddamn approval! I’ve never seen you say a nice word to anyone, I’ve never seen you laugh, or smile. I don’t know what your problem is, but I pity you. Not just because you’re unpopular, but because I pity anyone who thinks they can treat people the way you do. You should just shut yourself in a room and cry, because you are a pathetic human being!” Liesel was shocked. She had barely registered that Rylie existed, much less that she would be offended. Liesel hadn’t noticed that she treated people badly, she wasn’t even sorry that she had.

The reasonable corner of her brain was speaking up again, telling her she hadn’t been good, or nice, had basically acted like no one existed but her. She must have blown off and been rude to so many people, when she hadn’t cared to pay attention. When she had found everyone else beneath her. She really was a... NO! The

frustrated, angry morass that formed the rest of Liesel’s mind shouted loudly, drowning out any logical thought. She ran down the hall, hiding her face in her hands as she went. Beryl was angry. Rylie hated her. John might be with Beryl. She was too embarrassed to talk to April, the girl glued to her tablet. Liesel thought she knew what Miura had slipped in her pocket last night.

And there it was: The appropriate clearance card. But why? At the moment, Liesel didn’t care. She raced through the doors with some random square pinkish robot called AI-SU getting her through the first few. Then she opened the last door, and found Miura.

“Why are you here again?” she said in an abrasive voice. Liesel was still a little afraid of Miura, and responding with ‘shut up’ (as she would have liked to) seemed unwise. So she just went through the door without saying a word. Akon was the only one awake.

Liesel sat on the floor and said: “Hi,” in a rather sullen voice. Akon replied in her usual deadpan. “What’s the issue?” she said.

“Everyone hates me,” Liesel said bluntly.

“Don’t worry about it, you’ll just die, and no one will remember you, and after a couple years, it’ll be like you never existed,” Akon replied. Obviously, this did not help Liesel’s mood.

“Wow, thanks a lot!” she snapped. Then she walked out of the room, slamming the door as loud as she could, as some way to hurt the people who had ruined her day. All it did was hurt the doorframe. She ran out a back door, down a hallway, and into the yard. It was raining. “Oh, come on,” whined Liesel.

Then, out of the fog, a voice answered her: “Bad day?” it said.

“Yes,” answered Liesel. She whipped around to see who was there, and there was a tall girl, without an umbrella, partially obscured by the mist.

Liesel walked towards her, and recognized the girl as Rita, from the fight on the playground. She had no visible means of entertainment, or even a raincoat. Her eyeliner was running and her hair was soaking wet. There was a silent moment, then Liesel said: “It’s... Rita, right? Why are you out here?”

She shrugged, and answered: “Yeah, I’m Rita. Rita Snow. I like to look at the rain. Your name?” Liesel shrugged too, and gave her name.

“Liesel Tanner? Oh, my friend April said something about you. She said you were weird and unfriendly. She said you were sort of a jerk,” said Rita. Liesel tensed up at this, remembering what Rylie had said about her.

“Nobody likes you.”

But Rita continued: “People say the same things about me,” she said, laughing.

“The rain’s clearing up,” said Liesel, motioning towards the door.

“Yeah, guess I should go dry off. Meet me in the rec room tomorrow? Corry’s been busy lately,” said Rita.

And Liesel said “All right,” and walked away feeling just a bit better.

Liesel remembered something else then, from before the wipe: “Lis? Sorry for... you know,” a boy’s voice said.

Liesel even recalled her answer: “Okay. I don’t want to dredge it up... just forget it, all right?”

“Okay, Liesel.” Liesel had missed having people she could talk to, even with barely a memory of it. It was nice to have John, and disappointing to have Beryl mad at her. But Liesel felt that things were fairly good, her momentary depression was lifted. Despite the fog, Liesel felt she could see clearer than ever. She floated back into her room, ignoring Beryl (John was occupied with his game), she laid out a pair of green fleece pajamas. Liesel dug in her pockets, and found a small handful of the rosy-silver coins. She walked into the lunchroom, and purchased the only non-food item she could afford: A set of six juggling balls. Liesel walked to the rec room and hung back in a closet, and concentrated on throwing a ball into the air and catching it in one hand. She kept at it for about twenty minutes, and then decidedly mastered the art of tossing two alternating balls. When she found she couldn’t keep three balls in the air, she became bored and went to watch the holo-screen. There was some bright, loud, faintly Japanese cartoon on.

“Aiko...where’s Anzu? She was supposed to have the cure... she was supposed to help? And where’s Ayaka? Tell me! I have to know!” According to April, the show was called Aiko!Airi!Ayaka!, and it was about three girls who lived in the magical land of Illustria. Apparently, the current storyline was that Airi was gravely ill, and Ayaka had gone on a quest to find the cure. She had been apprehended by the evil Anzu, who had captured her, imprisoned her in a cave, and come to Aiko with a false story of Ayaka drowning in a river. Aiko didn’t tell Airi, because she was frail and Aiko wanted to protect her. Anzu wormed her way into the friendship, and claimed that she knew where

to find a cure. She had taken their money and magic items to “pay”, and set off, never to return.

Liesel found herself sucked into the plot, as the dying Airi and her grieving friend Aiko awaited Anzu’s return anxiously. At the same time, Ayaka tried in vain to escape with another prisoner, Aoki, and they were falling in love. It was extremely cheesy, but still it gave her something to do, and so Liesel found herself glued to the TV until Oliver came in.

“Ah, well, it’s... almost lights out. So.. eh... leave! Yes. Now. Do it.” So Liesel trudged back to her bedroom and pulled on her fleece pajamas. She shoved herself into bed and forced her eyes shut.

She had unpleasant dreams that night.

“I don’t like them, okay? I’m not trying to be mean. It’s just... Kit and Melanie are... my mom says I can’t be at your house when they’re around.”

“Come on, Diane! Demitri comes over when they’re there. Her mom is friends with mine. They’re nice!” Liesel found herself saying, despite not knowing what she was talking about.

“They’re not! Kit’s really creepy, and Melanie is on some kind of... something! There’s something wrong with them.” Liesel stepped hard on Diane’s foot, and made a face at her as she walked away. A cold wind ruffled her hair, and she realized it was freezing and she wore only a hot pink t-shirt and capris. She started running, but that made it worse, with the wind blowing in her face. She hit a patch of ice and fell, hitting the sidewalk. She put her head up, feeling blood trickle from her nose. Then she sat up in her room, thinking herself awake, raising a hand to her face, and feeling more blood dripping. She ran to the bathroom and wiped her face with tissues, filling the wastebasket over and over, and the whole floor was covered, but the blood wouldn’t stop, gushing from her nose, her ears, her eyes, her mouth... she began to choke on it. It was everywhere. Then she blacked out... and woke up.

The sun was shining, John was poking her, and her face was perfectly clean.

Liesel coasted through class, paying little attention. All she could think about was her dream, bleeding everywhere. Who were those people? Diane, Kit, Melanie, Demitri. Diane had been a girl with a thick golden-brown braid and green eyes like a lime peel. She tried to bring Kit’s face to mind. To her surprise, she succeeded. Kit was a girl with short blond hair and icy blue eyes. Melanie was red-headed, freckled, and she too had blue eyes. Demitri was the hardest, but he was

a short, thick boy with auburn hair and grayish eyes. Liesel wanted to know them, to find them, to find her life again. The clarity of yesterday had been swept away in the torrent of blood from her sleep. The information, the answers, only raised more questions.

After class, she decided she needed to talk to John. She pulled him into the front yard, and he helped her up a tree.

“John...”, Liesel trailed off. He picked her sentence back up, and with a few words, carried it a mile.

“What did Miura say to you?” John said urgently. “She showed me a room, with people,” said Liesel. He nodded, as if this was expected.

Then he said: “Who were they?” Liesel hated that certain nod, it made her angry when people knew something she did not.

But she responded civilly: “Two girls named Maribeth and Octavia, an older girl named Akon, and a boy named Octavian.” John nodded again, but this time more pensively, as though he was remembering something, like Liesel had. She wished she could see what he was seeing, access his memories with a card like a one that opened all the doors for her. But these were doors that didn’t come with a key card.

“I knew Octavia,” he said, after a long silence.

“I had a nightmare,” said Liesel, though it was unrelated. She wanted to turn the conversation back to her own problems. She didn’t have time for anyone else’s. John nodded, for what seemed like the umpteenth time, and said:

“Talk to Octavian. He’ll... understand.” Liesel nodded, climbed down out of the tree, and ran inside. She walked towards the rec room, remembering her meeting with Rita. She raced down the stairs, suddenly eager. Then she tripped over her foot and fell, banging her head on the stairs. For some reason, she didn’t want Rita to see her crying, so she gritted her teeth and held back her tears. Liesel stood up, and checked for scrapes and bruises. There was nothing, save a small bump over her eye. She put her hand to her head and kept walking, wincing a little. She made her way down, and there was Rita, in all her black-haired, eyeliner-wearing glory, standing formidable, looking at Liesel.

“Hi,” Rita said, “I have to show you something in my room.” Liesel nodded, like she understood, and the two girls walked up the stairs. Liesel opened the door, knowing that this time, she didn’t have to brace herself for the other side of it.

“C’mon, my room’s this way,” said Rita amiably.

She really was a pleasant, if somewhat odd person, despite her rather threatening looks. They walked down the hall several doors, then Rita halted quickly, causing Liesel to bump into her. They both laughed awkwardly until Rita opened the door. The walls, though pink like in Liesel’s room, were papered over with posters. There were recent bands, positively ancient bands that played genres Liesel had never even heard of. There were sports players, and motorcycles, and cats. What caught Liesel’s eye was a poster of the cartoon from last night. Aiko!Airi!Ayaka!, that was it.

Rita saw Liesel staring at it, and said: “You a fan too?”

Liesel shrugged, and said: “I watched some of it last night.” Rita smiled, and nodded, but it was a nod of affirmation, not of knowing.

“Anyway,” she said, “that’s not what I wanted to show you.” She led Liesel over to a shiny black box. She opened it up, and inside was an enormous collection of... toys? Rita grinned, and pulled one out. It was a stuffed panda covered in stitches, with a red heart crudely sewn onto its chest.

“I... change them, I like them better that way. This one’s Ren,” she said. Rita showed her quite a congregation of stuffed toys, plastic toys, dolls. Each had a name, and a unique feature given them by Rita. Except one. She pulled out a beautiful white cat, with blue glass eyes. “This one is Ariel. I... didn’t want to change her, because she was so nice, I have them act out adventures, and she’s usually the main character. I wish things like that would happen to me, that something would happen to me. I’m inner, you know,” Rita said. Liesel was thrown by the term.

“Inner?” she asked.

“Yeah, I live in the Water Lily development,” responded Rita, “By the lake. It’s very... um... crappy. Fancy, but crappy. And boring. Are you inner?”

“Um...” Liesel racked her brain. She couldn’t remember where she had lived, but she somehow knew the answer to Rita’s question. “No. I’m middle.” Rita sighed.

“Then you don’t know what it’s like, dear god,” she said. And Rita went on to talk about her parents, and how many rules there were in the development.

“They control what the outside of your house looks like, you can’t make a ton of changes to the inside, like rip out the floor or something. And then there’s the rules about pets: No birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects or tarantulas, or anything weighing more than twenty pounds. And no outdoor pets, either.” Liesel nodded sympathetically. “So why do people live there?” she asked.

“Because it’s all nice, and there are golf courses, and volleyball courts, and go-cart tracks, and upscale restaurants. And there aren’t bad neighborhoods,” Rita said derisively. Liesel nodded, understandingly. The sort of nod she hated. But Rita understood too. It was her life. “They let you dress like that?” Liesel asked.

“Nah,” said Rita, “I started dressing like this when I came here two years ago. My hair really is black, and if I wash out the gel it looks pretty normal. And it’s not like the eyeliner is tattooed on my face. I altered the clothes myself, I’m great at sewing, ever since I did the stuffed animals. I have changes of clothes for when I go home on holidays.”

Liesel shrugged, and said: “I should go, it’s almost lights-out.” As a response, Rita shrugged back and waved to Liesel as she walked out the door.

Liesel slipped into a blue nightgown, banishing the fleece shirt and pants to the laundry basket, though they weren’t really dirty. She made her bed, and turned over her pillow. No one could see the tear stains on last night’s pajamas, because of a memory she didn’t understand, and no one could see the sheets kicked off her bed as she had tossed and turned that night, drowning in blood. Her good mood instantly dissolved as she climbed into bed, and she found it hard to sleep that night. When she finally slipped into a comatose state, more dreams greeted her.

“So what’s this one?” Liesel asked.

“A serial killer,” said the blond girl sitting in front of Liesel. Kit. She pointed to the pink, crudely formed plastic kitten in her lap.

“You’re really strange, you know,” commented Liesel.

“Yup,” Kit answered. Liesel took a look at her dream surroundings. They were in a bedroom, with a silver, loft bed, and pale blue walls. It looked a bit like a hospital room, and Liesel easily connected the room to its occupant, who had milky blue eyes and all-white clothes. Then the dream dissolved, and Liesel was in the same room, but it seemed to stretch endlessly, and was twisted like a surrealist painting. In the middle of the room, there was the ugly pink kitten toy, and it leered at Liesel with its disgusting grin. She ran as fast as she could, trying to keep her balance on the distorted floor.

She got a few yards, then tripped and fell into a dark hole. She grabbed the edge, but a sharp, stabbing pain hit her fingers. The last thing she saw was the stupid pink kitten, with strange black eyes that seemed to be bleeding. The blood flowed out, flooding the room, and she blacked out. As she woke, she rubbed her eyes, as they burned from the sudden sunlight. The dream... the other nightmare with the bleeding nose, had made more sense. This one had barely had a memory, it wasn’t really grounded in reality. “What the hell was with the cat?” Liesel thought. Sadly, she didn’t know.

She walked to class with John, and he asked: “Did you talk to Octavian?” Liesel felt a pang of guilt as she realized she hadn’t taken John’s advice.

“No,” she replied quietly. John frowned, and his brow knitted together.

“Trust me. You have to do it,” he said. Liesel nodded. If she couldn’t trust this person, the only sane person currently residing in her reality... she didn’t know why, but she felt she had to. They walked to class, and Liesel felt depressed again. Every glimpse of her past made her more frustrated. But were they real at all? What if she was no one, nothing? What if she had no past, and her mind was just inventing one so she didn’t fall to pieces? Liesel hated the thought, and tried to put it out of her mind. There had to be a reason she was here, that these things were happening to her for a reason.

“Because... they just have to be!” Liesel decided, even as she knew that that was a purely ridiculous standpoint.

As the two proceeded down the hall, they passed Yarrow, whistling, and vacuuming the rug. John gave her a nasty look, and shoved her. With a metallic clank, Yarrow fell over, banging her head. She got up quickly, stupid grin still on her face. Liesel wasn’t angry at John for this, but she was slightly nonplussed. “Why’d you...” she started to say.

“She’s... it’s hard to explain,” John replied quietly. Liesel decided that she had enough questions, and let the matter lie.

Once in her class, Liesel tried to pay attention, and failed miserably. She wished that she had asked John more about his dislike of Yarrow. She felt he wasn’t telling her something. “Why is he allowed to have secrets, and I’m not,”

I HAD

A NIGHTMARE.

Liesel thought, annoyed. When the class was over, Liesel stomped out of the room. Next was music class, which did not improve Liesel's mood. As she didn't know whether she played an instrument, Liesel was stuck playing the tambourine. Most of the students were talented musicians, and they did excellent solos, charming riffs... Liesel? She forlornly played her tambourine, totally out of beat with the rest of the students. When classes finally ended, Liesel walked down to the rec room by herself. John had mysteriously disappeared.

She decided to go to the holo-screen and watch more of Aiko!Airi!Ayaka!. But when she stepped through the door to the holo-screen room, she saw two people fighting over the remote. It was clicking back and forth between a cartoon with dancing, multicolored blobs with faces, and a motocross tournament. The combatants were Rylie, and the boy who had almost beaten Noah in that fight-thing. Corry, that was his name.

They fought for a moment, and Liesel watched, as if the fighters themselves were an entertaining show. Then Rylie, having waved the white flag in the epic war for the remote, looked over at Liesel, and made a face. Liesel remembered what she had said to Rylie, and what Rylie had said back. Liesel didn't regret her actions one bit. In her mind, she thought, Rylie should have left her alone to start with. She left the room, feeling satisfied with her hatred. Liesel then decided that she ought to go see Octavian, as John had told her the day before. Yarrow was waiting at the door.

"Hi, Liesel! I guess Mac wants to talk to you!" she said, in her usual upbeat tone. This perplexed Liesel. Mac had been the programmer Miura had taken her to meet. What did he want with Liesel? Despite her confusion, Liesel followed Yarrow out of the room. They went through to Mac and Violet's workshop. Liesel stepped in the door... and a cat bit her ankle. Mac turned around.

"I think Shelley needs some reprogramming," he said.

Liesel only nodded. She had never liked cats, and the dream of the previous night hadn't helped. She walked further into the room. Mac gestured for Liesel to sit down. "We don't have much time, so I need to tell you now. Dr. Redford has your memory," he said quietly. Liesel was shocked. How did he... "How do you know?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"Because, Liesel, it's happened before. Miura, Octavia, Akon, Maribeth, Octavius. All of them. They came here to erase their memories, and when they wanted them back Dr. Redford wouldn't give them," Mac replied. Liesel

nodded, her hands shaking, and Mac continued: "She wouldn't because she wants employees she doesn't have to pay, and so she can test different forms of the memory serum. The only reason there are so few victims is that the serum is expensive."

"B-but... why them?" Liesel stammered, "Why me?"

Mac shrugged his shoulders and looked at the floor. "Because you were convenient, for whatever reason. I don't know why. But she can't make important people disappear," he said. But Liesel's mind didn't linger on this too long. She had another question.

"Why... did they want their memories erased to begin with?" she said weakly.

"Because they couldn't handle what was in their past. Whatever it might have been, it was terrible. I don't know about you, I'm sorry," he said.

"Can I... can I get my memory back? Is there a way?" Liesel asked hopefully.

Mac frowned, and said: "I... think so. Redford might have stored it. I'm sorry I can't give you more answers, and that I have to be so sudden. This isn't the first time we've tried. Octavia... Redford caught her and memory wiped her again." He looked utterly forlorn as he showed Liesel out a back door. It led into the yard, and Liesel saw Rita standing outside, whistling. "It's not raining," Liesel observed, "what are you doing out here?" Rita smiled:

"I'm waiting for it to rain. The weather broadcast said rain," she said. Liesel didn't feel like talking to Rita, so she just nodded, forced a smile, and walked away. She didn't feel like going to see Octavian. She felt like flopping down on her bed and not doing anything for the next twelve hours. However, when she reached her room, John was there.

"You spoke with Octavian, right?" he said.

"No, actually I didn't," Liesel replied irritably.

John looked confused at this.

"Where were you then?" Liesel didn't say anything. She only shrugged her shoulders, and looked away from John. She didn't want to talk about her visit with Mac. It had been overwhelming.

"I went..." she started to say. But John cut her off. "Please tell me you haven't talked to Mac, please. You have to listen to me Liesel, I know what I'm doing!" he said.

"I did! I did talk to him! How do you know all this? How do you know what you're doing? Tell me, or I'll kill you, I swear!" Liesel even surprised herself with this, but she brandished her metal suitcase, eyes turning red.

John started yelling, tearfully: "The same thing happened last time! Octavia talked to Mac, she thought she could save the Others and she was wrong! Redford told me to keep you out, but I didn't listen! I told you to go talk to those people so you could find things out by yourself, without Mac. I hate him, because if it wasn't for him, Octavia would be here! She would remember that I fricking EXIST! I hate him, and Yarrow, and his stupid robots! And I'm going to listen to Dr. Redford, because YOU won't listen to ME!" Liesel swung at John with the suitcase, but she wasn't very fast and she kept missing. John ran from her, and although he was slow he was faster than Liesel. She ran back to her room, feeling like the world was spinning. Her eyes stung like fury from crying, and she could imagine her tears, streaming out behind her like a river.

She ran, past her room. She didn't want to see Beryl. She ran past the rec room. She didn't want to see Rylie. She ran past the metal door. Redford could catch her. She came to a stop at Rita's room. Somebody needed to know about her. A somebody who wasn't John. Corry answered the door.

"Uh... what are you... why are you..." he said. Liesel was extremely embarrassed. Her hair was a mess, and there were tears running down her cheeks. But Liesel, to her eternal credit, asked directly.

"Where's Rita?" she said, her voice trembling slightly.

"I... Rita!" he called. Rita came over to the door.

"Hi, Liesel," she said buoyantly. Then she looked at Liesel's face. "I... you're crying," she said. She started out the door, obviously trying to avoid Liesel.

"I need to talk to you in private," Liesel said. She wiped her tears off on her sleeve and straightened up. Rita nodded, and started heading towards the yard, gesturing for Liesel to follow her. Liesel went, hoping that this strange girl she'd only known for a day would somehow understand.

"You are not going to believe a word I'm about to say. You're going to call me a liar," said Liesel. And then she told Rita everything. Rita's eyes widened, her face registering shock.

"What the hell, Liesel? That's amazing! I mean, no, it's horrible. But I mean... can you prove it?" Liesel felt daring.

"Every bit of it," she said confidently. Rita looked incredibly excited.

"Then show me," she said. Liesel wasn't sure why, but she had a sense of arrogance, confidence, and certainty that she knew she hadn't felt in a while. She wanted to

impress Rita, this older girl that seemed so powerful. There was that voice of reason, saying that Liesel hardly knew Rita, that she shouldn't be doing this. Liesel had grown used to ignoring this voice. And so she made Rita swear that she would never tell a soul, and Rita nodded in agreement and looked pious. Liesel then told Rita that she'd see her tomorrow to prove it, and said goodbye, utterly cheered. So what if John had betrayed her, she thought. She didn't need people like him. She had real friends. When she entered her room, however, she was greeted by an unpleasant surprise. Beryl. But then Beryl started talking, and it was not what Liesel had expected.

"I want to say sorry, Liesel. Whatever it is you aren't telling me, there's a reason. I saw you and John today. Friends?" Beryl said. Liesel didn't want to say yes, she wanted to stay angry, just like she always did. She didn't need to change, right? And there was that little voice in her head. And for the first time, she listened. The voice said no, you're not all right.

And Liesel said "Friends", and smiled. She waved politely. And realized she had been a jerk. She had been nasty. She didn't know if she could change. But maybe, just maybe it was worth a try. Maybe. She spent a few tokens on a strawberry soda. As she slurped it, she thought about Rylie. Maybe she had deserved it. Just a little bit. And she thought about John. She still wanted to kill him. It had only been a little while, she realized, since she had threatened John. And yet, she felt eerily calm. As though she were finally accepting her fate. She had to save the others, reveal what Redford had done, and be what she thought she would never be: Strong. All her life, Liesel had resigned herself to being weak and unfriendly, leaning on the intelligence that she hoped to god she had. She thought she could do everything herself, and didn't want to change. She didn't care, that was what she convinced herself. Still she wished she were graceful. And now, when she had nothing, she decided she would make herself strong. And she set herself a goal, the first thing that came to mind, the only display of strength currently residing in her memory: She would beat Noah.

She stayed in the lunchroom a long time, buying herself a second soda when she finished the first. Afterwards, she went down to the rec room, and found Aiko!Airi!Ayaka! playing. Ayaka had escaped with her love, Aoki, who was somehow actually a prince. It was absolute dreck. And Liesel found herself completely absorbed in it. And for the rest of

the night, Liesel sat watching. Trying to forget her troubles. And it worked, for a while. Until Liesel laid down in her bed and went to sleep.

She found herself in a small kitchen, where the walls were painted in the same shade of pink she was starting to get sick of. There was a glass-topped wooden table in the middle of the room. And sitting around it were four people: Kit, who she recognized from the previous dream, another girl, who her brain identified as Melanie, and... and... Liesel was shocked. For the face across the table from her was Dr. Redford. Her auburn hair was back in a ponytail, and she wore a pair of half-moon spectacles, but certainly it was Redford. Then Kit began to speak, and Liesel felt she shouldn't interfere with the dream.

"Mom, are we going to go pick up dinner now?"

"In a moment, Kit," Redford said in her ever-tranquil voice. Then Liesel realized the significance: Kit was... Redford's daughter. Then the dream dissolved, the pink kitchen melting away. She was standing alone in Dr. Redford's office. She stepped cautiously towards the door, reaching for the handle. She paused for a moment, feeling vibrations under her feet. "Vibrations? Where are they..." she said. She was not able to finish her sentence, because the tile under her foot dropped out from under it. Her leg was stuck in the hole, and she was holding on precariously, just starting to pull herself up. Then the floor fell in. She fell down, through the blackness, a million unidentifiable faces leering at her. Then she hit the bottom. There was searing pain, and then she woke up. In her bed. The lights were on, the sun was shining, and there was no darkness to be found.

"That dream wasn't so bad," thought Liesel. Unpleasant at worst. But more tantalizing was the information. Was it true? Was it something her mind had invented? Did Kit even exist? Did that entire room, that entire scenario, exist? Was any of it real at all? Liesel only wished she knew. As she walked to class with Beryl (John had left early, attempting to avoid Liesel), she found that she lacked the courage, the acceptance, the borderline euphoria of the night before. The epiphany of the previous night was gone, really. Liesel was not a brave girl, or the sort to keep promises. She couldn't even keep a promise to herself. But one thing remained.

She wanted to beat Noah, badly. She walked to class, deciding that she would talk to Rita about the fights. But not yet. First, she had to make good on a promise, to show Rita proof, a rare thing for Liesel. She tried her best to work hard in her classes, to get her mind off of... life. It was a difficult thing. But she did it, ate pizza and talked to

Beryl during lunch. During break, Liesel hung out on the monkey bars, and looked down at the kids. The playground fights would start up again next week, according to Beryl, who knew all about it. She made tokens off that, from all the amateur gamblers.

It was one of Beryl's favorite topics, and she kept on talking about it. "Noah, Rita, Corry, April, and a boy who's not any good named Bishop are all regular fighters. Dean was new. Likely we'll have some new ones joining up this time around. Bishop's the best for me, though, he's got two sisters, Shealeigh and Annamaria who always bet on him. And he always loses," she said. And this was only a fragment of Beryl's ramblings. But Liesel did not become bored, she simply remained interested and kept asking questions. She thought that if she were to do this after all, she had better learn all she could. After break, it was time for music class again. This time, Liesel was assigned to a tin drum, which was a little better than the tambourine. But then, Liesel realized something: She recognized the beat. She walked over to the other side of the room, to a drum set. A real drum set. And she played the beat in full. Perfectly. The teacher looked at her, surprised and somewhat exasperated.

"And you said you didn't play anything! Well, from the top then," she said. And Liesel realized that she knew the song, and knew it well, from more than a music class. "I look at you, then I look away, because you'll never look back at me..." Diane sang, and Liesel played the drums. That was how it had been, Liesel remembered. She knew it wasn't a very good song, it was just computer-generated pop. But it reminded her of friends, and so she loved the song with a passion. And she heard the girl in the music class singing:

"I look at you, and I look away, because you'll never look back at me, why do I stare, why do I stare, you barely even know I'm there. Why should I, why do I ca-a-are?" Liesel looked over at the girl singing, and saw an unexpected face: The face of Rylie.

The class finished up, and they did another song, but Liesel had to work on learning it. This song was unfamiliar, Liesel was sure. As she tediously practiced each note, she thought about Rylie, and whether she was so bad. She wasn't ready to forgive her yet, she was sure now, but that didn't matter, Liesel thought, she didn't have to hate Rylie. Really... she was a nice girl. Liesel knew it was true as she thought it, much as she attempted to deny it. But she could

not make Rylie the villain. It was nearly impossible. She was so... so nice.

It almost made Liesel want to vomit, the key word being almost. She had never been friends with people like that... had she? As she walked out, ready to meet Rita, Liesel wondered what she had been like? The same as now, perhaps? Better? Or more likely, worse. Then again, forgetting major life experiences probably did nasty things to a person. Liesel reflected on this, deciding that her memories were not so much gone as buried. She hoped, hoped as she had never dared to hope before, that she could dig them up. And then she found Rita.

"So, are you going to show me the proof?" she said brightly.

"I will, follow me," Liesel answered, her voice shaking somewhat. She led her down the hall, with a strange sense of déjà vu, as though she were Miura, or Yarrow, showing Liesel things she could not understand. Liesel considered that they, like herself, only feigned at knowing. That they led as blindly as she had followed, or at least perhaps with vision of the situation partially obscured. Yet they led on, as Liesel was doing that very moment, hoping they could do good through their duplicity.

When they came to the iron door, Liesel saw Yarrow, and pulled her over to get the two girls through the set of doors. It took a moment, but soon enough, they were standing in the room of USB sticks. The room of memories. Liesel, seeing no one around, tiptoed quietly into the room and beckoned for Rita to follow. The lights were out, and Liesel switched them on. Technically, she had already shown Rita more than adequate proof, but she wanted Rita to see these people, so that she might perhaps understand what had been done to them. But this could not be, because when Liesel turned on the lights, she saw the angry, ghost-white face of Miura.

"Who the hell is this?!" she shrieked. Rita seemed to shrink away, and gravitated towards the door. But Liesel stood her ground.

"I... I needed help," she said. This didn't help Miura's mood. She just gave Liesel a disappointed look and pointed towards the door.

"Leave! Go! And get your friend out of here too!" she said frustratedly. Rita hurried out the door, and Liesel followed after, panting and trying in vain to catch up to her. They slowed down on the way to the yard, their randomly selected destination.

"Who was that?" asked Rita. She didn't seem too disappointed, she had seen what she needed to.

"It was Miura, she works here. I guess I wasn't

expecting her to be there," Liesel said glumly.

"I don't really care what happened, but can you figure out her hours in case we go there again?" Rita said in an offhand voice. Liesel said that she probably could somehow, but wanted to say something more pressing.

"Will you... train me? I suppose I just mean that I can't win against corrupt scientific facilities if I get wind-ed running down the hall," Liesel said uncertainly. Rita grinned, and nodded.

"No problem," she said amiably. Liesel frowned at this, and shook her head.

"This is kind of an important thing you know, Rita. You don't just say 'no problem', you could get killed, I don't know how things will turn out," she said. Rita then made her face appropriately grave, and nodded slowly. She held out her hand, and Liesel shook it. The two parted ways, and Liesel spent the rest of the day in the rec room, chatting with Beryl and playing shoddy internet games. When it got late, the two friends went back to their room and read bad romance novels, while Liesel cast dagger glares at John and Beryl politely pretended he didn't exist, for Liesel's benefit. It was all lost on John anyway, he was absorbed in his video game. When it came time for lights out, Beryl said good night and Liesel crawled into bed without another word, quietly awaiting the nightmare she knew would come, both in reality and in dreams. She tried to be optimistic for a moment, remembering her pleasant day, but she gave up quickly and slipped off to sleep, hoping all would go well.

**I DON'T
KNOW HOW
THINGS WILL
TURN OUT.**

THE SKY

A POEM BY ELIZABETH MEDINA

The sky was so blue,
Cloudless as only a dream,
I wish I was there.



LICHENS AND AIR POLLUTION

AN ESSAY BY NINA DENNE

Lichens are the fusion of a fungus and an algae growing together in a symbiotic relationship. They are nonvascular plants that absorb water and nutrients passively from their environment, making them particularly sensitive to environmental changes. Lacking roots, stems and leaves, lichens can grow almost anywhere, but rely on nutrients they accumulate from the air. Thus, they are uniquely sensitive to air pollution, making them valuable as early warning indicators of reduced air quality. Lichens can easily absorb pollutants through a variety of mechanisms, making them ideal for studying changes in pollution levels. For example, a minimal increase in soil pH, which caused an even smaller increase in the pH of tree bark resulted in massive dieback of a lichen species, showing massive sensitivity (Huack 2011). Several studies are already exploring options to use lichens in society as well.

Several studies exemplify the uses of lichens for measuring air quality and pollution levels. For example, a study of one of Europe's most common lichens, *Lecanora conizaeoides* showed its extreme sensitivity to its atmosphere. This study observed how much the lichen covered trees and referred to historical records to analyze the change. After an increase in bark pH levels of only 0.4 units due to the industrial age, there was a huge dieback in populations of this lichen, showing how sensitive lichens are. (Hauck 2011).

In fact, due to this sensitivity, it is important that we correctly manage forests which harbor thriving lichen communities. A study in Germany analyzed the effects of different types of forest management on lichen populations. This study examined lichen diversity in three plots: one that was not managed, and two that were managed. The study noted that management techniques included removing dead trees and encouraging sapling growth. The unmanaged forest showed approximately 20% more lichen diversity due to the dead wood which provided habitat for lichens to grow. These findings demonstrate the impor-

ance of management systems that ensure stand continuity for lichen conservation. Clearly, the conservation of old forests with high standing biomass is absolutely necessary to maintain a high species richness of lichens and to promote threatened lichen species (Boch 2012).

A study conducted in Bengal evaluated the status of air pollutants by means of lichen through the biochemical variability of three macro environments (semiurban area Arambagh, urban area Burdwan and industrial area Durgapur). The study results revealed that there is an inverse relationship between pollutant load and pigment content (chlorophyll and carotenoid content). So the industrial area with the most pollution had the lowest pigment content in the lichens. This study has further application as a cheap and reliable source of data when measuring air pollution levels (Das 2011).

Another study was conducted in Portugal to explore the options of using lichens as an indoor biomonitor for schools. The current air monitoring system interferes with the classroom activities due to the noise and the sampling apparatus, decreasing the students' performance and attentiveness to the lessons/teacher. The lichen *Flavoparmelia caperata* and tree bark (*Olea europaea*, commonly known as olive tree) were collected and transplanted. They were then positioned around the schools, both indoors and outdoors. The schools in rural areas showed significantly less discoloration on the lichen and had better air quality. The data collected generated results significant at a 95% confidence level. These results show it is possible and easy to use lichens in indoor environments, despite the higher physiological stress that the lichens are under in these types of environments (showed by the higher values of electric conductivity that were obtained). (Canha 2011.)

These studies show that there is hope for using the sensitivity of lichens to air pollutants in the future. Lichens are a reliable source of measuring air pollution

levels due to their sensitivity to surrounding environmental factors, such as pH levels on tree bark. This is something that could easily be used in the future. However, we need to take lichens into account when managing forests, since current management techniques decrease their habitat and thus their diversity. Another easy use of lichens would be as an air monitoring source in schools. Lichens provide many advantages over traditional techniques, including being much safer, less intrusive, and more hands on for students. Therefore, while more experiments need to be done, I think that there is a strong connection between lichens and air pollution which could be used to our advantage in modern society.



ABOUT NINA DENNE

Nina Denne is 13 years old and has been passionate about biology since a young age. She has taken 2 semesters of biology at community college and this report was originally for this class. She is excited to share her passion in biology with others and hopes you enjoy reading!



GUACAMOLE RECIPE

A DESIGN BY RICHARD MEDINA



ABOUT THE DESIGN

The recipe for guacamole is on the two other sides of this triangular object. A small bowl of guacamole can rest on the top of triangle, and the object can be folded up for easy transporting.





A big thanks to everyone who contributed!

ROISIN A. GILBERT
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ZOLA A. PRICE
BEN MEDINA
MAURA GILBERT
APHRA SIMONE PRICE
ELIZABETH MEDINA
NINA DENNE

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Thank you to everyone who submitted their artwork and writings! This journal is biannual, so another issue will be coming out at the end of this year. Between now and then, I will be building a website for Hu.Art where artwork and writings can be uploaded and viewed throughout the year! I am also exploring having brief video or written interviews with the artists.

I'm glad you enjoyed the first issue of Hu.Art, and stay tuned for news about the Hu.Art website!

-RICHARD MEDINA

