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LUCK & LAVA

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IN THE FOREST WE LIVE

Elizabeth Wilson, age 16

The forest was full of life. Sunlight glimmered through sheer green leaves that hung precariously from their paternal limbs; the array of trunks submerged into mulch and soil; imprints of anonymous animals stamped the camouflaged paths. In the center of all these trees, a wooden lodge lay softly on the earth: unbothered, homey, and characterized by its quietness. Inside, a young man of twenty sat, his hair curling like the old leaves that frequently fell, peering out of the abandoned home. He thought pensively from time to time, reflecting upon his life and especially his past—especially the cabin's past. His family had once inhabited this place: the sweet memories now buried in the dirt, and washed away in the lake nearby. They were gone. In the forest, he lived alone.

His bedroom faced the lake behind the home, with a canopy of trees enclosing the surrounding area. Before he fell asleep, he often looked out his window, directing his vision to the sun: fading quickly behind the trees, into the earth with its siblings. The earth around him was laden with ecosystems, green life, and a cyclic shed of leaves from the overhanging twists of wood that touched the now darkened sky. In every moment, a new sound emerged from the expanse of trees: birds sang their last shrill melodies of the day, crickets began chattering constantly, and, beyond where the ear could pick

up noise, an owl was starting to hoot. Sound passed along like the day had to night.

The cabin itself was quiet—other than these nighttime noises—as it was mostly empty with the man inside. It was more of a vacation home, but nonetheless, no visitors seemed to cross its path. The guests that did appear were from nature: a spider that used an edge as its canvas, or birds that burrowed inside a loosely constructed nest within the dimensional parts of the lodge. But they left too. There were no people. There were no others. In the forest, he lived alone.

Eventually, a tapping noise began when the moon rose into the twilight sky of stars. As a white glow shone through his window, a bird—seemingly a small one—rapped on the window frame of his bedroom. The man found no issue with this, as he expected more noise to emerge as time went on. Noisiness during the night was no excuse for this, especially during the summer.

He could still hear the summer splashes from his childhood, how he had spent days relaxing on the gritty sand by the lake. In this very lake, frogs harbored on the tan rocks that turned charcoal from the frequent splashes of water. When he was a kid, his family would rent out the cabin and spend days vacationing there by the lake. Other than the occasional bickering with his siblings and the uncomfortable stickiness of sunscreen and tree sap, the memories were pleasant. He remembered going into the water, splashing about crazily, and grazing his toes against the rocks that had sunk to the bottom of the lake's floor. He remembered how peaceful everything was, how he'd go to bed with a prayer from mom and dad and dream of having superpowers. Yet that was a long time ago. Too soon was it, when everyone

grew up and there wasn't time for anything anymore. His parents had grown up past life itself. His siblings got married, his friends moved cities, graduated, they were all gone. And so he was alone. Alone in the woods in a home that made him more aware of his loneliness. In the forest, he lived alone.

After a few hours of the bird not tapping, it resumed again. By this time, the moon and sun were preparing to rotate roles: soon the sunlight would glow once again. Now, the tapping was filled with more of a longing, more of an ache in the noise. The bird started to scratch into the window frame, peeling away layers and disrupting any chance of sleep. The man arose from his bed, bones weary, to investigate the noise. Peering out his window, the world was still very much alive. Outside the cabin, crickets leapt, flies sang, and birds cried to their mothers. One of these, a foggy grey bird with fiery hues, was at the window. The bird was peculiar: its beak was curved in an arch unlike any he'd seen before on one of its kind. Sprinkled flecks of vibrant orange painted the wings of the somewhat small bird, in a delicate and inexplicable pattern. Like the wings, the bird's eyes had noticeable glimmers of color inside the midnight black. And in these eyes, there seemed to be more. A distant feeling that couldn't quite be named. Where did this bird come from? And where was its family? Did it have a family? The beak started to peck and tap at the glass pane too, and all the while the sun was rising in the sky. "Go away!" the man yelled, rapping his fist on the transparent divider between them. "I have to sleep!"

The bird pushed back. It tapped sporadically, expectedly, ongoing, every adverb imaginable, it tapped. He inched closer to the strange bird, again wondering where its family was. With a deep sigh, the man shrugged, unable to even

begin to close his eyes from the obnoxious noise. There was a rhythmic noise to the tapping now, thumps of double, every few seconds. Eventually, fed up with the ongoing noise that exacerbated his inability to sleep, he got up from his bed: feet walking on the wooden floor, creaking with each step. *What is wrong with this bird?* he thought to himself, not even putting on shoes to see the odd creature. With a lamp in his left hand and a stick in his right, he prepared to meet the obnoxious animal: the bird that would not close its beak.

Once the man approached the window where the bird was, it was still etching into the wooden frame, curving its hooked beak in various movements and bobbing its head. The sun had fully risen by now, bright light shining on the forest that had also awakened. More sound filled the air alongside the ongoing taps, and when the man started to listen more, he felt his own heart beat too. *Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.* They were both alone, but together in sound. In the near distance, a larger bird called out, and the fiery bird left with a quick flutter of wings, and of course, one last tap. Finally, after the bird was out of view, the man redirected his eyes to the wooden window frame. When he looked closer, he saw that the bird had tapped a word: *we*. He wasn't truly alone. We never are.

RAW REAL EVA VS. QUIXOTIC QUIZ EVA

Eva Palma, age 15

Dear Quiz Eva,

I have never heard any of your jokes, but something tells me they are quite the ticket, in a way that nobody seems to understand. The best ones involve references to things only you like. I've only seen you as a result of a time when I needed an ironic laugh. Your jokes and looks, things I claim I have. This is what supposedly makes you popular with boys. That and your quirky personality that we both share. You seem to have a side that is what society doesn't want you to be, but is expected by some. A lot like the skinny slob that stays skinny even after an all-night binge of barbeque chicken, with no stains on your flannel shirt you call "vintage" even though it's from 1992. That's just Eva with her edge. "Give her a water bottle, she is hot," is what they all say.

But what do you think of yourself, Eva, in your chunky heels and cat eyeliner? In an underground concert, you are only a spectator, but do you wish to be performing on that soapbox of a stage instead of standing next to the mosh pit? Would you be beating other sweating, edgy people in black? You might not even be at the late night gig that day, instead on the couch watching Netflix. What shows would you recommend? It's a possibility I might not be able to watch them because of me not having Netflix, just one of my many traits that make me abnormal to the average twenty-first century human in America, and that make me abnormal to you. I would give examples of your clothing of choice and features, but since it's an age of the world trying to meet each other eye to eye, I'd give comparisons. We are "quirky" and "smart," words that seem more and more meaningless when I write them, and we have few friends because of these characteristics. Someone in our lives might be in love with our appearance, but why would we care when we have our wits at hand? You may only be a creation made by the results of the internet and places where they encourage you to type your name for surprising results, yet you still feel unreachable. I may just be the closest Eva to match up to you, ignoring the many ways one would pronounce E-V-A. E for eccentric energy, V for vivacious vulgarity, and A for attentive aestheticism. I will never be you because you are unreal for anyone, which works well to some extent.

You give a boost of confidence to insecure girls, but they might take your advice too seriously and take up your habit of wearing tartan everywhere. If you were real, how would you even respond to this letter?

Signed,
The Real Life Eva

Dear The Real Life Eva,

Everyone is insecure and bored. That's why they hide it in black. Black leggings, black trench coats, black sunglasses, black metal. I've been wanting to dye my hair in the darkest variety of black hair coloring in the market, since we've moved on from loving blue-eyed blondes. At least that's what my last boyfriend said. I think it may be because he has black hair. That's how we met at some bar. You may not be old enough to enter one anytime soon, but it is more exciting while sober. I'm like your cooler, older version because I'm just cooler and older than you. You're right about the quirky bit too. Is that just being a warbly pixie in a circle skirt? Because that's not what we want to be, right?

Love,
Eva

THE APPLE ORCHARD

Isabella Hansen, age 14

The plucking of apples
is a delicate task.
Fingers have to be nimble
and quick
not too slow
because you don't want to pull the crisp
sunbaked
leaves
down onto you.

When you first sink your teeth into
the crunchy outer shell of a basic apple
an ordinary one
that your mom must have bought at a fruit stand
on the side of a dusty desolate highway
the exact taste
that floods your mouth
will be sandpaper

but the taste of the apple
that you handpicked
will have a sharper taste
zipping through your mouth
a lightning strike on your tongue
and as you breathe in the stench of dirt
you try your hardest to memorize it.

I HOPE WE'VE DONE SOMETHING INTERESTING

Opal Jane Ratchye, age 16

Opal Jane,

I hope we've done something interesting,

I don't know what yet.

Like fly to the moon or write something that

changes someone's life, something as big as that.

Or if that isn't in the cards, do the best

we could have possibly done, I honestly don't care.

Because loving myself is what it takes to be happy,

and that's what we've always wanted to be, right?

I hope you found a way to break bad patterns.

I'm still figuring that out.

I hope you learn how to stop.

Especially stop watching too much TV,

because I am doing too much of that right now.

I hope you learn how to love like I do now.

I hope you look back on me and don't miss me,

because you have something better now.

I hope that you sometimes (only sometimes)

get what you want,

because getting what you want isn't good for you.
Don't be lazy, don't take shortcuts.

I hope you are never trapped by a lie.
Because that is the worst feeling,
 lying awake at night because of something you did.
The thought that you broke someone's heart
 because of your own selfishness.
I hope you never break somebody's heart again,
 I hope you only repair them.

I hope that you are still there for the friends I have today.
I hope you never have to lose them.
I hope you never have to get reacquainted
 with someone or something you love.
But if you do, have the strength not to run away.
I hope you stay to beg and pray for forgiveness.

I hope you never stop writing.
I know we've never dreamed of
 being a famous poet because our calling is in other things.
I hope you never get so lost in the push forward
 that you forget to write.
There will always be time every day for you
 to open your notebook and write.

I hope that when you're in the deepest of emotional valleys,
 you will always remember that you will not
 stay that way forever.

Luck (if you believe in it), inspiration, will, stubbornness,
will be back.

Like waiting for water to boil,
you'll hover anxiously over the pot, waiting,
and as soon as you sit down it starts to boil.

A watched egg never cooks, even Siri knows it.

I hope you gain experience to back up my big talk.
I hope you follow my advice
and find some more to add onto it.

No, thank *you*,
Present Opal Jane Ratchye

THE THYME POTION

Toby Chandriani, age 13



568 made it | 5 reviews | 6 photos

This potion was found a long time ago. The only problem was that the people who found it thought it was cursed and never used it. They burned every recipe book that contained it and never used it, to the point where people thought it was just a story. Just recently, this recipe was uncovered, and people experimented with it to see if it was safe and found that it was. All it did was bring you into the past and let you watch what was happening without being able to affect what was happening. The only place to get cold lava is from a volcano on the coast of Hawaii. Unlike normal lava, when this magical lava cools it stays in liquid form. In 1901, in a small village near the base of this volcano, a few kids had gotten lost exploring the volcano and became very hungry



and thirsty. There were stories of cold lava being edible and so the kids decided to try and make a drink. All they had was a little bit of water in which they were rationing and some thyme that was growing around them. These kids tried ripping up some thyme into small pieces, and mixing it into the water, and then adding a little cold lava. The kids each tried a drop at the same time. Suddenly, the plants around them changed a little and when one child tried touching a plant, his hand went through. Since these were little kids, they thought they had died and become ghosts and could travel through things. The next day they were brought back to normal life and everything was how it was the day before. When they found their way back to the village, they were scared and told of the potion they had made. The elders of the village declared it the work of the devil and that it was cursed.





8 min



1 serving



3 cal

PREP

5 min



COOK

0 min



READY IN

5 min

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups water
 - 1 cup cold lava
 - 1 cup thyme
-

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 *Mix in the chopped up thyme and water.*
 - 2 *Pour the cold lava in a cup at the same time as the water and thyme.*
 - 3 *Drink one drop of the potion for every year that one wants to go back in time.
For one year, drink one drop and for two years, drink two drops and so on.*
-

NOTES

By doubling this recipe, it won't make someone stay in the past longer but just allow them to go further back in the past. Most importantly, THIS POTION WILL NOT WORK IF IT ISN'T USED WITHIN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES OF IT BEING MADE.

RAIN

Maya Van Artsdalen, age 12

I hear the leaves drinking rain.
I'm happier in the rain, not the sun.
The blue's gone gray.

It's quiet, I like when it's quiet.
That day, there was loud rain.
Loud, wet, and cold.
It was loud like my house.
The feeling that you feel when you don't want
to be somewhere,
like when you don't know where to sit in the cafeteria,
like I didn't want to be in the air.
The moment I let go, I realized holding on
was the best way to not fall off the swing.
When I fell off, I started crying.
And I thought I was dead.

I didn't want to die that way,
I wanted to die being an experiment,
for the truth of what happens after you die.

It's calming, rain.
There's a special smell, a clean smell.
It's like if all the smells I love were combined together,
 but wet.
Like when something's new.
The affection I have for rain cannot be explained.

ABOUT 826 VALENCIA

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

826 Valencia is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting under-resourced students ages six to eighteen with their creative and expository writing skills and to helping teachers inspire their students to write. Our services are structured around the understanding that great leaps in learning can happen with one-on-one attention and that strong writing skills are fundamental to future success.

826 Valencia comprises three writing centers—located in San Francisco’s Mission District, Tenderloin neighborhood, and Mission Bay—and three satellite classrooms at nearby schools. All of our centers are fronted by kid-friendly, weird, and whimsical stores, which serve as portals to learning and gateways for the community. All of our programs are offered free of charge. Since we first opened our doors in 2002, thousands of volunteers have dedicated their time to working with tens of thousands of students.

PROGRAMS

Field Trips

Classes from public schools around San Francisco visit our writing centers for a morning of high-energy learning about the craft of storytelling. Four days a week, our Field Trips produce bound, illustrated books and professional-quality podcasts, infusing creativity, collaboration, and the arts into students’ regular school day.

In-School Programs

We bring teams of volunteers into high-need schools around the city to support teachers and provide one-on-one assistance to students as they tackle various writing projects, including newspapers, research papers, oral histories, and more. We have a special presence at Buena Vista Horace Mann K–8, Everett Middle School, and Mission High School, where we staff dedicated Writers’ Rooms throughout the school year.

After-School Tutoring

During the school year, 826 Valencia’s centers are packed five days a week with neighborhood students who come in after school and in the evenings for tutoring in all subject areas, with a special emphasis on creative writing and publishing. During the summer these students participate in our Exploring Words Summer Camp, where we explore science and writing through projects, outings, and activities in a super fun educational environment.

Workshops

826 Valencia offers workshops designed to foster creativity and strengthen writing skills in a wide variety of areas, from playwriting to personal essays to starting a zine. All workshops, from the playful to the practical, are project-based and are taught by experienced, accomplished professionals. Over the summer, our Young Authors’ Workshop provides a two-week intensive writing experience for high-school-age students.

College and Career Readiness

We offer a roster of programs designed to help students get into college and be successful there. Every year, we grant several \$20,000 scholarships to college-bound seniors, provide one-on-one support to two hundred students via the Great San Francisco Personal Statement Weekend, and partner with ScholarMatch to offer college access workshops to the middle- and high-school students in our tutoring programs. We also offer internships, peer tutoring stipends, and career workshops to our youth leaders.

Publishing

Students in all of 826 Valencia's programs have the ability to explore, experience, and celebrate themselves as writers in part because of our professional-quality publishing. In addition to the chapbook you're holding, 826 Valencia publishes newspapers, magazines, books, podcasts, and blogs—all written by students.

Teacher of the Month

From the beginning, 826 Valencia's goal has been to support teachers. We aim to both provide the classroom support that helps our hardworking teachers meet the needs of all our students and to celebrate their important work. Every month, we receive letters from students, parents, and educators nominating outstanding teachers for our Teacher of the Month award, which comes with a \$1,500 honorarium. Know an SFUSD teacher you want to nominate? Guidelines can be found at 826valencia.org.

826 National

826 Valencia's success has spread across the country. Under the umbrella of 826 National, writing and tutoring centers have opened up in seven more cities. If you would like to learn more about other 826 programs, please visit the following websites.

National
826national.org

Boston
826boston.org

Chicago
826chi.org

DC
826dc.org

Los Angeles
826la.org

Michigan
826michigan.org

New Orleans
826neworleans.org

NYC
826nyc.org

San Francisco
826valencia.org



The Writing and Publishing Apprentices workshop is a weekly gathering of writers ages thirteen to eighteen and volunteer tutors at 826 Valencia. In this workshop, writers explore a variety of forms over the course of ten weeks as they take a piece from brainstorm to first draft to polished perfection, with lots of free-writing and group workshopping along the way. This spring, as the workshop transitioned online, these writers kept their inspiration alive with vivid settings, musings on the future, and words so powerful they could hardly be contained in a Zoom call.



826valencia.org

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