

PROJECT ID:

TITLE:

KEYWORDS:

AGE OF STUDENT(S):

Annotation

As the climate crisis begins to get more and more serious, I think it is important to use all forms of media available to us to raise awareness about it. Personally, I've always valued writing as a creative and emotional outlet, so I thought it would be somewhat therapeutic to infuse the stress and grief I was feeling about climate change into my writing. I wrote about the experiences of a young girl trying to change the world but failing to because no one would listen to her. I think a lesson that all young people can learn is that your voice, no matter how small and insignificant it may seem, has the power to create a change and make an impact. If not today, then tomorrow or in the future. I feel that we as young people have been and will be the most affected by climate change because it is our futures and the futures of our children that will be at risk. That is why we feel a sense of responsibility to call upon our governments and world leaders to fight for change in terms of legislation, and to call upon our fellow citizens to fight for change socially. Only together can we raise awareness about the seriousness of this impending topic and create a better future.

The West Wind

There are many things you learn when you live in a big city. You'll come to know the many different types of neighbors, which butchers in your area will give you their mutton scraps that are perfect for an Irish stew, and what type of animal is scavenging in your garbage depending on the volume of the racket.

But I, like most dwellers of the big city, am not originally from there. The things you learn up north - in the *backcountry*, as it's referred to by the common urbanite - where you spend your summers scraping your knees by the riverbank and collecting multicolored blossoms and oddly shaped rocks, those are things you never forget.

Among them is that a wind that comes from the west is the most dangerous. That's an unforgiving wind; a ruiner of crops and a destroyer of homes. Often, a west wind will start as nothing more than a delicate breeze floating on air. Almost instantaneously, it'll turn into a whirlwind of harsh bursts that nip at your cheeks until they're sore, like the constant crack of a merciless whip.

The day of the first wind of the season, no one dared leave their homes. We northerners are often called simple, and we are. But where people go wrong is

thinking that equates to stupid. It's ingrained in us from toddling-age that we're always at the mercy of Mother Nature; we don't test the strength of creation, could never claim to be superior. The wind was dreaded, but it was also admired. The raw chaos of it was something we countrymen could respect - with it came truth and integrity, both things we valued up north. Where I grew up, we couldn't count on much, but the purity of nature was something we understood. It was good, organic.

My father used to say that my sister was like a west wind. It wasn't until I returned home after nearly a decade away and learned the truth that I finally understood why.

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The earliest memories I have from my childhood are all near the creek that ran behind our home. My sister and I would trek every day down the hill and towards the rumbling water as it ravaged the boulders lining it. The majestic larch trees framed the clearing, their branches filled with prickly needles and decorated with pinecones like ornaments on the Christmas trees that we could never afford.

My sister used to stand on the highest rock and stretch her hands to the sky. She would urge me to join her, but I was always too scared. Too scared of the damp stone and the water rushing beneath it and the fall in between them. She was the courageous one in the family; that much was obvious as she stood with

her feet firmly planted and looked out onto the horizon as if it was her moss-covered kingdom. We may have been at the mercy of Mother Nature, yes, but my sister bowed down to no one.

She was four years my senior, and I tried so hard to keep up. But she was on a different wavelength it seemed, a frequency none of us could interpret. The cause of most of my parents' arguments, my sister lived in her own world of abstract thoughts and intricate musings. My mother claimed my father indulged her too much, while my father insisted she was just a girl and would eventually grow out of whatever phase she was in.

He lost that battle when she wasn't allowed to come back to school anymore. The principal, a gloomy widow with a tight updo and an even tighter code of conduct, alleged that she was influencing the other pupils with her odd statements and that if my father knew what was good for him, he would stop saying these things at home where his children could pick them up. No matter how much my father maintained that he had no idea what she was on about, she refused to back down.

My parents didn't bother enrolling her in another school, keeping her at home instead where my mother said she wouldn't have an audience for her nonsense.

She said things like "*the men in suits will begin to take away our home*" and "*the lungs of the earth will burn*". She never explained what she meant, just the vague declarations and wistful looks in her gray eyes. Though the announcements were often ominous and sinister, she never looked afraid. My sister always seemed to know something that no one else did. But with this knowledge, she was never smug. If anything, she looked constantly burdened, as if her slim frame was responsible for bearing the secrets that the wind whispered to her.

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I returned home with a duffel bag on my shoulder, a limp in my leg, and more back pain than someone as young as I should experience. I had fought in the war for just over seven years, but my military career came to a less-than-glorious end when a swift bullet to my thigh declared me incapacitated, and I was sent home. Going home was just about the last thing I wanted to do, but with no higher education, no money besides my monthly army pension, and no house of my own, I had no choice.

Our home had long since been abandoned, so the house that was already falling apart showed no signs of life.

While exploring my sister's old room, the sole of my boot caught on a rogue splinter on the wooden floor. In my attempt to pull it off, I accidentally took

the entire section of the floorboard with it. My eyebrows furrowed in confusion. I knew my own strength, and while I may once have been easily capable of such a feat, this was my bad leg, and I certainly couldn't do that now.

I was proven right, and it turned out the floorboard had been loose. As I threw it to the side, a small flash of navy stood out among the dirty brown. There, snuggled between the damp lumber was a pocket-sized leather notebook, its pages frayed and its woven spine barely holding itself together. The edges also seemed to be wet, no doubt a result of the decades-old leaking pipes in our house.

I flipped through the small book and instantly recognized the handwriting as my sister's. Her all-caps scrawl filled each page; obscure notes, odd drawings, and indecipherable scribbles providing a gateway of sorts into her mind. I skimmed through the writing aimlessly, until my attention was drawn to something at the bottom of a page.

The men in suits will take away our home - 1st February 1987

I stared at the words, not sure what to make of them. I had heard this phrase before, several times, from my sister. But not once had she followed it up with a date. The page itself had no date, so I had no way of knowing when exactly she wrote this, but it can't have been less than ten years ago, before they took her away from us. How had she written a date more than a decade into the future? How had she known?

I gasped as the realization hit me. The first of February, the year 1987.

Today.

The exact date I come home after several years away, and here it is, written in my sister's notebook nearly sixteen years ago. It's got to mean something.

I flip frantically through the rest of the notebook, searching for any further clues. But, like always with my sister, there's no explanation. Every note brings more questions than answers.

Who are the men in suits? Why would they take away our home? And why would they do it today, when I'm here, when they could have done it anytime in the last seven years? Absolutely nothing makes sense.

I know that there's nothing I can do, no one I can tell. I have no option but to wait it out.

I set up a pillow and a few quilts on the dilapidated sofa in our sitting room, figuring it'll be better in case anyone breaks in. I curse my sister for once again being so vague and giving me no information to work with. My nervous thoughts keep me awake, and sleep doesn't come easily.

It's light out when I wake up, and nothing has changed. Nothing in the sitting room, or any other room for that matter, has been moved or taken. The

army taught me how to be a light sleeper, so I'm certain no one could have possibly broken in without my knowing.

I sit there, confused and devastated. I truly did believe my sister, always have. When the doctors came and took her away, I protested and pleaded. I begged my parents to reconsider, but they thought she was crazy, and so did everyone else in the village. They'd had enough.

She was sent off on Sunday, 13th September 1970, and that was the last time any of us ever saw her. We received a letter three years later saying she had died. That was it. No explanation whatsoever. They didn't allow us to see her, or bury her body properly, or give us any of her belongings. My parents realized much too late that when they admitted her into that hospital, they had signed away her life.

I decide to take a walk into town, both to clear my head and to ensure that I don't starve. Everyone here knows who I am, but no greetings come my way. Not that I was expecting any, of course.

I'm entering the produce market when the daily paper on the newsstand catches my eye, the headline written in a large bold font.

Couring Development Company Acquires Land around Montcoln Creek to make Affordable Housing for Local Residents.

A wave of understanding washes over me like a bucket of ice water as I scan through the article. The deal went through yesterday.

The "home" my sister referred to was never our house - it was the creek. The men in suits must be this foreign development company, and they're taking the creek. They're going to tear down the trees and bulldoze through the entire area, just so they can build some condos.

She was right. Oh my God, she was right.

I ran all the way home, ignoring my rumbling stomach and sore leg and race upstairs to where I left the notebook. My sister was right about this, meaning she could be right about so many other things. There had been hundreds of those notes. I furiously pored over the rest of them. They all seemed to have the same theme - the destruction of the Earth. Some of them are specific, like *the lungs of the Earth will burn - June 2019*, while others are broader and don't have dates after them, *such as the gray sky will choke the creatures beneath it*.

My sister had been warning everyone for years. She'd predicted the rising sea levels, the demolition of natural habitats, everything. And no one had believed her.

I finally understood it, though, finally got what my father had meant. My sister *was* a west wind. Except her devastation didn't come in the form of blowing away crops and toppling over trees - it was her truth.

The cold hard truth she was presenting would destroy everything we had ever known before. It was all here, in the little pocketbook she had hidden in the floorboards years ago, just waiting to be found. And I had finally found it.

It became clear what I had to do. The truth of the west wind must be told, and it was up to me to tell it.