8-20-2019

A Sudden Sunset

Alexander Meyers
Portland State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses

Recommended Citation

10.15760/honors.809

This Closed Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.
“A Sudden Sunset”

by

Alex Meyers

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in University Honors and English

Thesis Adviser

Cornelia Coleman

Portland State University

2019
Drifting is the process of moving from one world to another. The energy it takes to Drift depends on many things. It takes a speed of around seven miles per second to Drift out of the Earth. When you Drift into the universe, you will find your station like a fungus—a mushroom of a kind that grows in unlikely places and lives because of unlikely circumstances. Mushrooms grow in between the sky and the sea and that’s what makes them taste so delicious. We have much to learn from mushrooms and movement that is still.

When you Drift into the world of another—like mine—that takes a different kind of force. It takes stillness; sitting; listening; and perhaps taking a stand with your thoughts. The fringe between day and night and the papercuts when you put your hand deep into a bag looking for a lost letter, the energy of an enchanting iris, or a glistening orb of ink at the end of a pen before it asserts something on the page. I like ink that is the color green or brown or close to yellow. Anything blue or gray makes me nervous and is too close to the color of the ocean, and I readily desire to jump.

Drift Theory is a recapitulation of shock, as close to the edge of the ocean on a foggy day. It’s the force of sideways energy on a clear day. The current that flows like curiosity.

You may wonder why I use the word theory. Does that reveal irreality, or an unstable proximity to truth? Is it the trauma of fragmentation, or the continued desire for specificity? Is it the punishment of continuity outside of word?

Drift Theorists after me will recognize that I do not know the language of the Drift. That’s why I’m trying to make it while I write. The instability of language thematizes its necessity, why I write.
From my place in the stars, I see everything.

The Luna Sea House and the Driftwood are right across from each other, one a deep-sea blue encrusted with fake barnacles and a pirate’s ship, and the other a faded orange, the color of cozy embers on the Oregon coast. That’s what draws the tourists in, the embers.

Around August sunset, Ariadne catches a glimpse of Ash lighting the fires for the Luna’s outside seating. The encroaching mist is cool, but the fires are warm. That constant pull and push, cold and warm, is why people eat their fish and chips by the firelight, in a town too close to the ocean.

When the waves reach the hills that threaten the stars, there won’t be anything left.

The two siblings could never work together in the same place, but a street’s width is enough to permit a sidelong smile. When their shifts end—Ash gets off a half-hour beforehand—and they drive home together, it is forged in silence. Not a silence of their choosing. A silence caused by the missing.

This night is special, in particular, because it is Sunday before school starts up again and that is chowder night.

Ariadne comes up the little hill outside the back of the Driftwood Inn where Ash is waiting in the driver’s seat of their beat-up Ford Meteor. If his face lit up when he saw her it’s because he’s bored and yearning for home.

The car smells like fried fish. Ariadne shrivels her nose like she always does when she smells it. Ash scowls like he always scowls.
“As if you don’t smell like coffee and French Fries. What’s that?” Ash says, looking at the cardboard box in Ariadne’s hands.

“Huckleberry cobbler. For mom. I saw her today buying mushrooms at the farmer’s market.”

“Chowder tonight,” Ash says.

Ariadne dislikes clam chowder. That’s important, don’t forget if you care at all about my coming and going.

Ash turns the keys several times trying to start the car.

The impotent car finally sparks and the exhaust howls black. As Ash jerks the gear shift, his hand stops at the neutral position when he sees Daisy, small and blonde, walk out of the Drift Inn, making her way to the car.

“Did you serve her at the Drift tonight?” Ash said.

“No,” Ariadne said. “I don’t know what she’s doing.”

Daisy doesn’t demonstrate any measure of acknowledgement but her intent is clear enough when she stops in front of the car and stares through the sea-smudged glass. Her eyes skip over Ariadne.

It’s hard to hear her over the idling vehicle sputtering sound. It’s possible that she doesn’t care if she’s being heard—she just wants to feel the words as they pass through teeth.

“Do you miss him more than me?” she says. Muffled. “Do you forgive...the night?”

“Drive away, Ash,” Ariadne says. “She never liked us anyway.”

Ash drives away. Daisy turns away too. And they are both gone.

If you should understand something, understand that something has changed. Driving through the village—we can say village because there are no intersections with stop lights—at
sunset used to be a spiritual experience, an understanding that time folds in on itself because every time you watch the sunset driving through the village it’s the same spiritual experience. What’s missing is the missing aspect, the puncture of silence is sharp when it used to be warm. Ariadne stares at her phone instead of the sunset. Ignores it because ignoring is a choice. When they turn north to drive towards Huckleberry Lane, a lighthouse erupts out of the horizon. I say erupts because that is the only word to describe its bent axis, an obsidian tower against a lava sky.

Perhaps a monument to ruin.

The lighthouse is built in the middle of Yachats Pluck School. A red brick building when everything else in that time was made of logs. That time was 1890. It is two stories too high, bending and baying at odd angles, fraying on the western exposure where the salt whips off the sea every day—salt is the main component in flavor. Drive along Highway 101—look at the coast and if it’s windy the waves will be strong--and when you reach Morel Lane, turn right. For a moment, the road slopes and there is speckled grass and sand hugging the edges. It resembles a spine, and when you’re driving west the school might appear to be a head rearing to dive into the ocean.

The Yachats Pluck School Lighthouse wasn’t an afterthought, it was a mistake. It was built with the intention of guiding ships to safe harbor, and turned out to be too short. The Heceta Head lighthouse was built soon after, in 1894, at a proper height.

No one would ever think to moor at a lighthouse, but Pluck School is so close to the ocean it sometimes appears like a harbor. Famously in 1969 a ship moored on the beach because it confused Pluck for harbor. The ship stayed there and served as a classroom for at least a decade before the captain decided to reclaim it. It is said that the Captain, called Ingot, sailed to
the North Pole and was discovered in 1994 under a sheet of polar ice. Nobody knows where the ship went. Scrawled on a piece of writing in his jacket read a note with handwriting the reader of this story might be familiar with.

_I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you._

Here nor there, here and now, Ash and Ariadne pass Pluck High on the way home from the village, the burning palace of the sun far to the west, knocking through their windows in crushing columns. Their beach-side cottage is a mile or two north of Yachats. Pass the aquarium-blue Silver Surf Hotel and you’re on your way. Turn at the old shambling convenience store that may or may not be open for business anymore. Drive around it on a dirt road and you’ll see a circular cottage at the end of the lane, perched over the ocean. The crumbling clouds on the horizon blur the slope of the hill before falling onto beach, so that it appears as if Ash and Ariadne are driving up the marbled steps of Heaven. It is certainly not some zenith, it is not some nadir. It is their home, a world founded on touch and feeling. These most deceptive qualities can make a home like a prison.

The curtains are drawn over enormous bay windows on the western side of the cottage. The light is trying to force its way in like an intruder, grasping the edges of the dark blinds with sweaty fingers. Maybe it just wants some chowder.

The smell of clams and crabs and salt and pepper and every crustacean in the sea that could be de-shelled grind at their senses of smell.

The living and dining area in the cottage are fused on the first floor and it’s like a tide pool of living human creatures. The divisions between kitchen and living room and dining room and the bay windows are unclear and unargued. Two lumpy gray couches envelop the living area. The dining table is under the three tall and wide windows facing the west. Three rooms
branch off the north side of the cottage, and the eastern edge is dominated by a door that leads to a pathway down to the ocean.

This door, dark and concave and—be careful—a descent of three steps, is like a tide pool. Encrusted with barnacles and dried sea stars and anemones; galoshes limp, salt-laden rain coats, a forgotten web-ridden sand-bitten kingdom of sandcastle armaments. Near the tide pool door, the memory of a spiral staircase jutted down from an attic room where Dorian once slept. The attic door is shut, and barely any light trickles through the cracks.

That door is the first one I walked through, and it was the last. They don’t use it anymore.

Mom comes out of the woodwork of the pearl-white cabinets holding a wooden ladle. She loves those cabinets—I thought they were too white. After Dorian left, a woodworker offered to do them for a discounted price, and Mom jumped at the offer. When the house was supposed to be empty, a woodworker and his son came from a town a few towns to the east and stayed in Dorian’s room for three days to install the cabinets. I don’t think they realized who the attic belonged to. I don’t know if I’ll forgive Mom for that. People kept going up there like they were renovating the contents of his brain.

“Don’s huckleberry cobbler,” Ariadne says, putting the greased-up to-go box on the bar.

“It’s chowder tonight,” Mom says.

“Are you going to put mushrooms in it?” Ash says.

“Yes,” she says.

“It won’t bring him back.”

Ariadne charges across the living room and rips the curtains open. Like revealing the thick yellow vellum of some ancient religious text, the light bursts forth.
“I put the sea in it,” she says. “Like the first night he came. I dug for a clam—no pearl—and added a dash of seawater.”

“What kind of mushroom did you add?” Ash says, who has an intimate knowledge of mushrooms. Every year he volunteers at the Yachats Mushroom Festival that takes place at Pluck High, except it’s not happening this year because of what happened the year before, when I went missing. That’s the word they use—missing. Lost, absent.

“Morel, I think,” Ash’s mom says absently. “I remember you and Dorian went picking for them around this time last year to prepare for the Fungi Fest.”

Ash sighs. She blames him. Everyone who knew about Dorian’s plan to Drift forever blames him for the mushrooms.

“We harvested them last year like we do every year,” Ash says, grinding his teeth, walking to the bay windows where the dining table is cleaved in pieces by the falling light. A cheap vase his mom found in a thrift shop in town years ago with blue geese flying in patterns stenciled on.

His mom reaches for a yellow spice on a spice rack and trickles it over the chowder. She never takes her eyes away from the ladle or chowder. It is ritual.

Ariadne’s feet come announcing from her room. With a notebook and plushy sweats, she collapses into the couch and gives her the best view of the sea and the tightening tension between Ash and their mother stirring her clams and crabs and sea pieces. She doesn’t really care about the chowder—it happens every year and she’s a go-with-the-flow kind of person. I always thought this would make her good at Drifting.

“Why don’t you tell me what mushrooms you harvested last year?” she said to Ash.
“This time exactly one year ago? This Sunday one year ago? I don’t remember, and even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you.”

If he remembered, and he does every day, he won’t tell her. Maybe it’s a difference in their age, or maybe I’m foolish to think that you can ever stop growing up. She wants me back from different reasons.

II


I’ve been trying to get my mom to add mushrooms to her clam chowder for almost three years. Every year when the chowder gets made the Sunday before school, I go and harvest mushrooms, soak, rinse, cut, store, wait. I’ve tried every mushroom you can think. I present them to her in a basket and she says: No, not this year.

When? Time is running out. Don’t ask me how I know.

If she adds the mushrooms into the chowder, I know it’ll make a difference and I think that’s what she’s afraid of. If she adds mushrooms to the chowder, the sky and the sea will merge again and then the Drift won’t stop.

*   *   *

Ash twists and turns and buries the journal in his hands, every molecule gooey and pulsing with the life of his lost brother—as if it is a precious planet covered with water and primordial prototypes and Ash’s hands are the fabric of lightning.
Ash remembers a year ago today. The night it happened. He can’t remember much because time is capricious and takes flight like a finch if you try to catch it. He considers asking his mom but doesn’t because he’s tired of fighting: why did you finally cave and add the mushrooms?

III

From my place in the sea, I see everything.

Ariadne looked out of the windows of the Drift Inn at an aching veil of darkness waiting to be filled above the horizon. Scattershot clouds looked like rips in the fabric and behind them was more darkness. The Luna Sea House on the other side of the street where Ash worked was bustling. Tourists rattled in and out carrying their halibut and cod and mushrooms. The Drift Inn was busy too, but it attracted a different kind of client. Groups of people found no places to sit in the Luna, so they moseyed the other way and wandered into the Drift where Ariadne showed them to their booths.

Ash was in the Luna somewhere, probably getting burned by frying oil or frowning at customers who didn’t know what they wanted to order.

Posters for the Mushroom Festival were pasted all up and down the street, and nearly obscured the aquamarine blue of the Luna. The Drift Inn had a special on the Chanterelle Mushrooms. Some sort of pasta dish. Ariadne hated all the food at the Drift Inn except for the huckleberry cobbler. Everyone loved the huckleberry cobbler with the scoop of vanilla bean ice cream. Dorian once said you’d have to be insane to dislike it, and that’s perhaps the truest thing he ever said. (Even people who didn’t like the cobbler found themselves indulging the cobber.)
Dorian once had a brilliant idea to go picking huckleberries himself while he picked mushrooms. He was young and decided to put them in the same basket. He’d make enough money to buy a new pair of boots he really wanted. He wanted those boots so bad. They were some kind of yellow galosh, the kind you might wear to pick mushrooms and then run down to the beach later in the day to build sandcastles.

Ariadne got off at seven—Ash too. The sun was almost set. She didn’t even bother looking at clocks because she knew the sky well enough and the way it changed through the fall. It was starting to set before she got off work, which meant that winter was coming. Even though winter was usually mild on the coast, she still disliked it.

Ash loved the winter.

When they got back home, the sun was maybe half an hour from setting, and unknown to them, it would be the longest half-hour of their life. When they got home, Dorian was not there because he was volunteering at the festival—this year he would unveil the secret mushroom and give out raffle prizes. He probably wouldn’t be home until ten and he would be incandescent with happiness until twelve, and then he might wake up smiling.

But something was different about the atmosphere of the house when Ash and Ariadne arrived and exchanged their sweaty clothes for comfortable ones that would see them through the rest of the night and convened at the dinner table. It was about 7:10. The time was going so slow—the sun was descending like an incantation out of the sorcerer’s mouth, slow and methodical.

The two of them sat down at the table in sync and wished that their mom was home from work so dinner was already steaming up at them and they could stop eating the ridiculous amount of clam chowder made the week before.
The first strange thing that gave the hint of Dorian’s absence from the Mushroom Festival was the presence of his journal and knife at the table, like some kind of horrible suicidal scene. The journal was not hastily thrown, nor nonchalantly put to rest, it was deliberate and angry and sad and to anyone that knew Dorian—dangerous. Little bits of cut-up mushroom too, and another fatal scent. Clam chowder.

Ariadne picked the journal up. Something was different. He put his hand down and watched her open it. The sheets were blank. Blank. Nothing was written in them. If not for the dirty, aged leather, the pages gave off the delightful newness of a journal waiting to be filled with journeys of parade and triumph.

A piece of thick paper fell out of the journal and it was impossible to tell if it fell from the ceiling or the journal because it lilted in the air as naturally as a bird had taken flight and shed a feather.

Ash picked it up and looked it up and down and left and right and no one had ever looked at anything that carefully in the cottage, including a jeweler who had been invited to dinner one evening decades ago and was convinced his host’s wedding ring wasn’t a real gem. How wrong he was.

“What does it say?” Ariadne said.

*Look for me in the sudden sunset, when the stars taste like the salt of the sea.*

And all the crabs were gone. When it was about a quarter after seven and the sun had barely trickled into the pale of darkness, and the two of them were still, giving their ears space to fill the cottage, there was only the sound of waves. There were no suckling anemones on the door to the sea, no starfish, there was not the sound of crab’s feet scraping the wooden floors. It was all quiet. Even the sound of the sea was muted. Everything was quietly alarming.
Ash focused on the paper. Looking for something that might give him a clue to the strange void of words in the journal. It was a painful conclusion to swallow—that Dorian had finally put together his recipe, found the right species of mushroom that might fling him back from the place he came.

Ash remembered something: Dorian was always checking the time.

The minute of 7:16 proved that time was fractal because it started and ended at the same 16 and broke down and down as Ash and Ariadne feared the dawn of realization. That the day they dreaded may have come.

The two of them exploded out of the cottage and drove to Pluck with Ariadne at the wheel. They knew they had to find Dorian before the sun set. They arrived at Pluck, driving over the spine, at around 7:19. Ash parked in the farthest parking space from the school because the cars were piled up near the entrance. They ran to the large double doors where Daisy was greeting people with pamphlets about the festival and dance.

“Hello,” Daisy said with a spirit and smile as wide as the opening of a clam’s shell. She stopped them from going inside with her small frame. She put her hands up. “Wait. Have either of you checked your phones?”

They had not. It had not even occurred to them to check their phones because each of them knew that Dorian did not know or desire to use a phone. Their mom made him get one for rare contact when he went into the forest, but there was rarely service, so he never took it with him.

“Everyone’s been trying to reach you. They sent Mr. Larson to the Drift Inn. Nobody knows where Dorian is. He’s supposed to unveil the mushroom but he’s not here.”
“He’s not inside,” Ariadne said firmly to no one in particular. “He’s not inside. Where is he, Ash?”

Ash did not know how to say that he did not know. In this nonplussed state, it seemed easier to say, “How should I know?” The words snapped.

“Well, we need to find him,” Daisy said with an air of caution. “For the unveiling of the mushroom. But it’s not a secret to me anymore—he actually told me. Did he tell either of you? Do you want to know?” Daisy felt as if she knew something that others didn’t and that fulfilled her because it was one of the few possessions she had.

Ash and Ariadne ran inside before answering her, leaving Daisy starstruck and singular. The mushroom extravaganza occupied the lunchroom. Most of the tables were folded against the walls and several were still spread and winged, ready to take off at any moment. They were stacked with mushrooms of all kinds and experts from afar gathered eager students around to share techniques for proper picking and preparation. And of course—there were prizes and games that incorporated mushrooms to some degree.

The dance was happening in the gymnasium and was connected to the lunchroom by a long artery guarded by mushrooms that lined the hall like sentinels. Big mushrooms carved out of wood and even painted.

Muffled music echoed through the halls.

Without as much as a glance, Ash and Ariadne ran inside Pluck and dodged it all, going straight for the heart of the school. Positively out of place. They made the first right and then left and rushed to the Pluck Lighthouse entrance in the middle of the school. Up the beleaguered, warped metal steps that several times had been replaced, giving the stairwell that eventually twisted into something circular and sinister the glimmer of a fake metal tooth hiding in the
cavern of the mouth. To discourage students from using the lighthouse after a certain time, the lights had to be manually activated and the switches were locked in the janitor’s cabinet.

It was probably something like 7:25 but their sense of time wasn’t really that great after all and perhaps it was really 7:26. The only light came from the top of the lighthouse and percolated like coffee. It was the golden hour. The white, harshly plastered walls transmuted into melted gold as they ascended the spiral staircase, creaking all the way under their combined weight and urgent step. How long that staircase was. They climbed it in the forever minute between 7:25 and 7:26.

It’s possible that when they arrived at the top and didn’t find Dorian to be at the top or outside on the thin balcony with the creaky railing, they climbed back down and then climbed back up hoping that the universe had made a mistake and—indeed—we meant to deposit Dorian there. And in that version when they get back up to the top he’s still not there and all they can do is witness the end of the golden hour.

This is the Hour of Gold. The shadows cast by the sun are swallowing Yachats. There’s barely any time left. From the spire of the lighthouse above Pluck, they can see the rocky crags of the Smelt Sands that are endlessly chewed up by the gnashing waves. The ocean is foaming at the mouth, unable to break the rocks.

Something like 7:28. Two minutes now.

The clock is moving so slow. There is no clock. It is the Earth and the sun moving around them and on the point of Pluck—the lighthouse—their vantage is astronomical. Every cosmological secret is spilling over the rim like a courageous cup of milk. The lighthouse will turn soon. When the sun disappears over the horizon. A long time after 7:30, that is. When the
golden hour ends, that is when the lighthouse beacon will turn on and oscillate a beam that guts into the ocean.

Dorian was the designated light keeper tonight. After the unveiling of the mushroom, he agreed to wind up the steps and turn on the light. Afterward he might wander down into the gymnasium where the dance is held. He wasn’t a good dancer, but he liked to watch people dance—even the awkward dances of high school. It was the rhythm that he liked, if people could find it. To step in time. He thought it was impossible to deny a dancer reality.

Something very real happened at 7:29.

“Where is Dorian, Ash?” Ariadne said with all the gravitas of an object falling at escape velocity. Seven miles a second. Any small object would be obliterated, even sound, but not the force of the words.

“I don’t know,” Ash admitted.

They were standing by the light mechanism. The small room barely fit a few people. The railing and walkway that encircled the small glass lighthouse head was dangerously oxidized and the metal was beginning to peel. It was used for cleaning the glass and it was against the rules for students to exit the head through the panel that opened onto the railing. There was a key.

There is little reason for students to want to walk on the railing. Unless they are dared to do so. There was an incident nearly two decades before the imminent incident. A kid was dared at lunchtime to go on the railing. All the students gathered on the beach to get the best view of the lighthouse head. He climbed all the way up and opened the panel, his body broken up the light reflected prismatic. When the panel opened and he appeared on the railing, the students cheered and cheered for him.
Nobody was watching when Ariadne and Ash forced the panel open. It was locked, but anyone who had been a lighthouse keeper knew the lock could easily be forced open. Sheer danger and threat of suspension and an evolved security system kept students off the railing.

There they stood at 7:30 on the railing, their heads bent slightly because the eves were low. “He’s really gone, isn’t he?” Ariadne said.

“I don’t know,” Ash said.

IV

Dated Nov. 2017

I told Daisy about the first time I Drifted. I can’t wait to tell Ash or Ariadne. I know they will find out soon because it’s not in my nature to keep secrets—to wait like mushrooms and absorb the information when it falls from the sky and seeps into the earth. It’s only a matter of time before they know.

The first time I Drifted was a Monday. I think it was something like the first day of school but I like school so every day is like the first day to me. I sit in class and Mr. Larson, my English teacher, asks us to write something creative. I start to Drift when the words flow out of me and I feel the light falter and I look outside. The ocean is there but it isn’t our ocean that Mr. Larson’s class faces on the western windows. I start to remember the place I am from, and I do not know what to call it or what it looks like so I keep writing and I keep Drifting.

An ocean that belonged to another world. Something almost familiar to me. I could tell because the waves were calm and the way the light of the sun folds like it does when it kisses the
waves. The wind was barely shredding the surface water and there was no foam frothing at the lips of the waves. And the water was a lighter shade of blue than the grays I am used to.

I Drifted for the next hour. I normally loved the windows in Mr. Larson’s class because they faced the ocean, but now they tortured me. I couldn’t see the land—I didn’t know what to expect. I was Drifting on a new world and I could only see the ocean. The thing I loved most became the thing I liked least in that hour. That always happens to me.

And so I waited and waited for class to end and I might have even made a strange sound in my frustration. And when it ended, I felt the Drifting fade like a mirage on the horizon that you keep running toward. I packed my backpack almost ten minutes before class ended and I even thought about leaving early—but I knew that only an impeccable character—someone who follows the rituals—gets to experience the Drift, and if I left early it would never return.

I bolted out of that door in a flash. And I ran for the eastern side of the school. That’s the only time you’ll see me running to the east—because I’m almost always running to the west.

And when I passed the base of the lighthouse and saw the window in the distance—the mirage was fading fast. And it was only that. A mirage. My mind was making it up at that point because the Drift was ending. When I got to the window, there was only the parking lot and the same Yachats in the distance. The black Meteor that belonged to Mom was down in the parking lot stuffed with coffee cups in the one seat that went unoccupied when all of us drove home after school ended.

I learned how to manage the Drift act the older I got.
One of the most difficult parts about writing is capturing the tone. It is in the tone that reality is imposed. A good writer masters the tone and they master reality. I am not a good writer. I am a writer telling the events of the story. And in this moment, tone is shredded up and only words survive. This is the dialogue between Ariadne and Ash in the minute of 7:30, the end of the golden hour.

Ash: Whatever mushroom he picked and cut up and—god—I bet that was the big secret mushroom he was gonna unveil. He ate it.

Ariadne: Last night he came into my room after you and Mom went to bed and said that sunset was spilling over and you could swim in it. I thought he was dreaming, like he used to. I think he was being literal.

Ash: It doesn’t work like that. It doesn’t fill up and you can’t swim in it. You’d be flayed alive. If he were going to kill himself, he wouldn’t do that. He’s terrified of pain.

Ariadne: Kill himself? Why would you even say something like that?

Ash: Killing himself is the only thing that explains why he left his journal behind with a cryptic fucking note in it. The note doesn’t make any sense. And there were no words in the journal.

Ariadne: I don’t think he did it. I know he was sad sometimes, but he always said that. He was always honest about it. I thought if you were honest about it and didn’t bottle it up it didn’t matter.

Ash: I said the worst possible thing first.
Ariadne: What the fuck?

Ash: I just wanted to see your reaction. I don’t think Dorian would kill himself either. He liked mushrooms too much. Anyone that likes mushrooms that much—going and picking them and eating them—wouldn’t do something like that. I think I was just thinking about death because the sun is going down.

Ariadne: You’re an asshole. Not sometimes either. All the time.

Ash: I don’t know where he is.

Ariadne: We’ve established that already. I know you don’t know where he is and I don’t know where he is either.

Ash: Do you know much about the stars?

Ariadne: What? I know a little, as much as Ms. Galen taught me in our freshman science class. I think it was—do you remember that kid Benjy? That day we were put into groups of three—no, it was four, and he asked us to be in our group. We had to build a replica of the solar system. You, Dorian, and I. And Benjy. He was the weirdest kid.

Ash: I remember. You and I thought he was weird as hell and we didn’t want him in our group but Dorian insisted.

Ariadne: Why’d you ask about the stars?

Ash: Look where I’m looking. Can you see all those stars? I have never seen stars that bright. They barely look like stars. Are they satellites?

Ariadne: They are stars. I can tell.

Ash: One of them is so bright it is reflecting off the water.

Ariadne: Point to it. Really? I’ve never seen that before. And the sun is barely hitting the ground.
And the minute of 7:30 ended. It went on for a long time. All the minutes bent and snapped and fractured forever.

The stars glimmered brightly, and the last solid rays of the sun quavered. The brightest star that should not have been there—the lodestar—grew even brighter. Its edges stretched and scintillated. It warped the dusk and the clouds and seemed to bounce on the plane of reality.

Ash reached out and grasped it.

Ariadne turned at the moment that Ash reached out his hand because the light exploded—the lighthouse and the star realized incandescence at a shared moment in time, the difference infinitesimally imperceptible to Ariadne.

With the star exploding in his hand, he stuffed it into his pocket and the lighthouse light oscillated so that its hateful glare no longer consumed the brother and sister. Ariadne did her best to wipe the blinding light out of her eyes, angry noises fluttering out of her.

Ash pushed the star into his pocket. It fought against him, searing his hand. The smell of burnt hair and clothing. But he pushed it down and it quieted and became cold.

Before the beam of light crushed them again, they stepped sideways on the haphazard railing until they were inside.

“That was stupid,” Ash said.

“Of us,” Ariadne said still squinting in the darkness.

He was rubbing the exterior of his back pocket, feeling a pliable lump that careened in his pocket like a boat on rough waters. Ash was as aware as he was unaware of what he had just done—few people ever dare to pull a star from the sky. Ariadne was daring—Ash was not
daring. It was a different thing that compelled him to pull the star from the sky. And lie about it. Any daring individual boasts about their conquest. Ash was silent.

VI

Ariadne and Ash stood there behind the pivoting beam of the lighthouse. It forged a path into the dusk, a lodestar to weary travelers adrift in the oceans.

“The sky looks strange,” Ariadne said.

It occurred to Ash that she was right. The ocean looked rather aquamarine and the place where the ocean met the earth—the sand was not its usual boring brown. It was something like stucco and salt and tones of cinnabar. But he could hardly think about the sky and the water and the sand when he was stowing a star in his pant pockets and it was growing immensely cold and heavy.

The stars are low and look like fruit off a great tree. It is difficult to tell if they are even stars.

Ash plunged his hand into his pocket again and rifled around to grasp the shrinking—but increasingly heavy—star. When he wrapped his fingers around it, the star submitted. It relaxed and Ash felt a branch of warmth course through his arm like a hug.

He felt Ariadne turn around because the space was so confined. When you wanted to leave the lighthouse, you turned around—so that’s what he did. So he followed her and his mind was quite occupied.

Yachats means “dark water under the mountains” in an old indigenous language. The mountains aren’t enormous, but they are fair—they are honest mountains. In the lighthouse, one
of the tallest structures in Yachats, facing east, one is towered over by mountains that hide the sunlight until late morning in the summers.

When Ariadne gains her footing after Ash stumbles into her—she is too distracted to scold him. She is enchanted by a cadre of lights in the distance. No hills obscure Ariadne or Ash’s view. The lights are strange and twisted and spectacular and dense and blatantly numerous with far too much depth. The lights must have stretched for miles. And the lights were colors of yellow and red and blue and especially orange.

What was captivating about the lights was the way they appeared and glowed out of nowhere, as if the sun were raising and sharp objects jutting into the sky were the first to capture it. But the sun was indeed setting.

They could see beyond the lights too. Whatever was attached to the lights or whatever the lights were attached to stretched for leagues and had no end. In fact they could see forever.

Because Ash and Ariadne and an entire school below them has Drifted into another world. And the rules are a bit different here.

And so that first week ended on Friday night at the last embrace of the golden hour. Hours no more. Time is kept differently here.

VII

Dorian postulated the epicenter of the Drift if the school were to Drift into another world—a particular world. And he was right. Why was he ever doubted? Dated MDorianh 2018
It’s true I come from somewhere else. I don’t have much to go off when I try and remember it. Submerged in water or nebulous dust or both I just can’t seem to remember. The Drifting is dangerous—I know it’s dangerous. It’s the stuff of making—memories, matter, language. It’s the stuff of unmaking. But how else am I supposed to get back?

Displacement. Drifting is harmful to the environment for several reasons. The ne plus ultra is the displacement of space that occurs when an entity Drifts from one world to another. In the case of a single person—the displacement might be felt by the people of the surrounding city, the people of the surrounding village and the trees and the flowers, the feral ruins that endure beyond the time of persons and plants.

But a school holding a thousand students who are sweating and breathing and heart-pumping-liquid. Some of them are dancing and that is transcendent; and some of them are talking and making eye contact; and there is even a pair that is kissing. It is too much to easily process. And the size of the building—the supporting beams, the two levels, the lighthouse spire that still—in the absence of electricity—gives off a particle-shattering light.

The displacement is felt by the entire world. And the core of the earth quavers.

When I talked to people as I gathered the shredded remnants of this story. This is what was felt across the world:

In the Holy Paladin Empire. The school of Bronzon—in the ancient city of Bronzon—where the first Paladins signed the Stega—lost their language (for a moment). That linguistic dysfunction was the greatest and worst of all the things that happened. Whey they lost their language (for a moment), fear did not desire to be spread, indeed fear was afraid and recoiled and it was all eyes. People just looked at each other or looked out of their windows or looked out
of their doors. And they waited. And when the tsunami wave settled back into the sea, the flotsam of their dread and anxiety littered the little Empire that stretched itself with determination.

In Anhalt. The wave was smaller when it hit the first island of Anhalt. And by the time it reached the last island of Anhalt it was even smaller. They did not lose their language. The displacement shifted their telescopes by degrees and all the telescopes in the Constellation of islands had to be readjusted after the Drift. The ones closest to the Drift epicenter were the most confounded and had to be greatly adjusted.

In the Republic of the Golden Dawn. Because the world is not flat the Republic was hit just as hard as Anhalt. In the Republic the people started to glow. At least they did not lose their words. Their buildings started to glow too. In fact many Paladin structures around the world started to glow because an old compound that was associated with a different age was reunited with its reactive agent.

In Regio Elementi. The crystals began to crack. No one really knows why it started there first. Perhaps because the primordial, the eldest crystals and those with the most wisdom, existed there and they did it peacefully. As peacefully as a breeze doesn’t intend to bother anyone. As peacefully as a stream comes from a source of water. As peacefully as a fire starts in the wake of lightning. Which is all to say it is a matter of perspective. These crystals do not know malice, they know movement and change and is embedded in their form.

In the lost world of the clouds. The people there felt the displacement too. But only a little. The clouds shifted ever-so slightly. And that’s it. No one except the lost people of the clouds could feel the displacement.

In the Green. It was felt last but perhaps most deeply because it was directly on the other side of the world. If you were to skewer the school through the earth, the point would emerge out
of the Green and probably prick someone like Tariana who was in the midst of her blind training. She was so deep that the water reached her knees one day when she mistakenly wandered into a bog where all the water collected on the plateau.

VIII

The only people who did not feel the great displacement were the denizens of Pluck High School. Almost all students and a host of chaperones and teachers who helped to run the Annual Mushroom Extravaganza. To those were not Ash and Ariadne in the lighthouse—with an incredible view of the world—life continued on much as it had. When the music shorted out in the dance and the lights flickered off, still the dancers were lost in their haze of awkward movements and they considered it a minor and ephemeral annoyance. And a strange thing floated through the small gym windows that normally allowed a trivial amount of light in. Solid shafts of light cut through them now at an aggressive slant. And the shafts shifted ever so slightly in direction like a knife gutting a body.

“The mountains are gone,” Ash said, looking to the east. “I wish the mountains weren’t gone.”

“I wish that too,” Ariadne said. “I miss the mountains. I liked the way that it was like everyone was waiting for the sun to rise over them every day.”

“I don’t think you’ve ever waited for anything in your life,” Ash said. “You’re terrible at waiting.”

“I waited for the sun to rise over the mountains every morning. Dorian taught me how to do it.”
The two of them looked out at the city that was completely foreign to them and it was to the west, where the ocean should be. The height of Pluck Head Lighthouse had always felt extreme and dangerous—now it wasn’t tall enough to capture the city that sprouted up before it, hundreds and hundreds of times larger than Yachats. Dorian is somewhere in there, isn’t he?

It was so enormous compared to Yachats that Ariadne realized she was exhausted. And she had a passing thought that Ash fell off the lighthouse tower and she had not been able to reach him in time and then Ash was gone. In the depths. It was strictly forbidden to go on the roof of Pluck high school—like it was forbidden to ascend the lighthouse—but nobody dared to go on the roof because it was not extraordinary—it was boring. And so no one dared to be caught on the roof. Who would go look for his body if he fell?

Ariadne was rushing down the stairs before these thoughts passed and before she could even look at Ash to make sure that he had not jumped.

The Golden Hour had ended, and the abyssal zone of the lighthouse was absent of color and Ariadne found herself feeling the edges of the wall to guide her steps.

“I’m behind you.” And after a pause—“I’m still behind you.”

“I can hear you,” Ariadne said.

Ash slammed the door shut when the two of them finally emerged from the dark trunk of the lighthouse. Though the lights were flickering with decaying fluorescence—was there any electricity?—it was brighter than the imminent darkness of the steps leading down the lighthouse. On solid ground—or at least more solid than the twisted and leering lighthouse—Ariadne caught a stable breath.

Ariadne realized it was one of those special moments before desire and disaster when the inner world and the outer world are crushed in alignment. Everyone is moving about in a natural
way and all Ariadne can do is watch them and appreciate what they don’t know yet. Maybe Ariadne is the lucky one because she already knows, and the realization and subsequent dread won’t be as poignantly enforced.

“We have to find Dorian before everything goes to hell,” Ariadne said with a crystalline mind. Her fear of heights no longer clouded her vision.

Ash fingered something in his pocket. Ariadne wanted to ask him what it was but she knew they didn’t have long before people realized what was going on—why the power had gone out.

* * *

Ash tried the door to the classroom. It refused to open. Locked.

“Let me try,” Ariadne said. She grabbed the handle of the door and twisted it. She kept trying and only exhausted her strength.

“Stop,” Ash said. “I’ve tried this enough to know that there’s no way we can get in. There has to be a set of keys though.”

He was thinking too smart. Ariadne looked around. A case of trophies holding debate trophies. This was the English Hall after all.

“I want to break glass,” Ariadne said. “We just have to break the window over the door handle and open it from the inside.”

“These are extreme circumstances,” Ash said. “Sometimes the circumstances are extreme enough that you have to square up with them. So we just have to break the glass and take one of the trophies out and then use that to break the glass over the door handle. Easy.”
Ash wasn’t thinking smart enough. He was distracted. Distracted by the trophy that had Dorian’s name on it for a poetry competition that took place every two years. Dorian won it in his first year of high school. That was rare. People never did that and he got a trophy with his name on it and Mr. Larson—the English teacher—used his keys to open the trophy case and put Dorian’s trophy to fossilize it in the layers of the school and its many glass cases filled with trophies. Ash didn’t have any trophies.

While Ash was caught looking at the trophy—a gold thing that looked more like the color of fake cheese slathered over plastic—Ariadne took off her boot and smashed the window. Cracks spread out but the window was protected by wire mesh. So she smashed it again and again until Ash’s reverie was broken and he was in the moment.

When the glass was shattered, the mesh was easy to push out. And then they opened the door and took a breath before walking through the door.

Mr. Larson’s English classroom was spangled with posters about sentence grammar and affirmations of achievement—as long as you were yourself then you might achieve greatness. It was good enough—the you.

There were also many abstract pictures and obscure vocabulary words like perspicacious and anathema and trinkets that were more than often fat and golden and punched on the walls like clocks. It was the kind of room that would only ever belong to Mr. Larson because his things could never be removed from the room. The palimpsest would take a board of surgeons and home remodeling experts to remove his present viscera from the walls.

And Dorian ate lunch there every day. On odd days of the week Daisy joined him when she wasn’t whisked away to practice playing the flute. Imagine they talked about mushrooms and cooking and books.
When Dorian thought about it—only when he was thinking about it—did he realize how lucky he was to be that perfect trope of a student inspired by his high school English teacher. Not many people liked Mr. Larson because he asked people to work hard and stretch themselves and not many people were ready for that, to feel their words fall flat on the page. The kind of work that shreds self-esteem into small ribbons and only in creative necessity can someone take those ribbons and make something beautiful.

And the windows. The windows faced the west and they were—in the immortal words of Ash and Ariadne’s grandmother who used to work at the school—something else worth dying for. Worth dying for. There were only a few things worth dying for to their grandmother. The classroom—every pie that was ever made—the sunset. Dorian never met their grandmother; she died before he walked through the tide pool door the first clam chowder night.

The windows swallowed up the entire wall and were rimed with salt and wind like cheese that was brined for too long. There was once a story about students breaking into the school in the middle of the night and making their way right to Mr. Larson’s classroom because something about the composition of the glass illuminated the stars and all the sky and sea seemed to spill into the room. The waves came right up to the windows in winter storms and the class had withstood a tsunami.

Out of those windows Dorian Drifted. He watched the water spin until it was otherworldly. And that’s when he knew he Drifted. The slate blue merged into something too green and too calm. The coast of Yachats was rarely calm.

“He’s here,” Ariadne said. She walked into the heart of the room and spun and spun the span of the room looking for Dorian. Her brother dizzied looking at her spins and the crashing stars outside of the windows.
“How do you know?”

“Because my stomach feels sick.”

“You were just spinning around like a child. So your stomach hurts.”

“My stomach only ever feels sick around Dorian.”

One of the things Dorian wrote about when he Drifted was the nausea. The upheaval of the stomach region is a moment of absolute contingency and singularity—it is the anchor of the body. Dorian had spent a lot of time thinking about nausea because it afflicted him to a degree of misery. In terrible bouts. He had seen doctors and they always called it something like the flu, but Dorian knew it was more.

The two of them scoured the room. The desks were orderly enough. Shifted slightly from the way they were so neatly organized on the first day as the classes came to fill the room and left it like in waves. Like the sand drifts over time.

Mr. Larson’s desk was at the front of the room. Rather like the walls, it was toppling with papers. From previous years. He must have liked the way the papers looked because there was no way that graduated students still expected to receive feedback on their papers.

Nothing was found.

“Nothing at all,” Ash said. “So much for you spinning around and getting sick to your stomach.”

“I tried to do what Dorian would have done. He always rotated around when he walked into a room. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe he’s not here and he didn’t Drift.”

Ariadne put her hands up against the window glass. Dorian used to do that too. Did he think of jumping? The glass was always smudged up. The glass in Mr. Larson’s room was
famously covered with fingerprints because the students who broke in put their fingers on the
glass to try and get closer to the universe looming on the other side of the glass.

“Try it,” Ariadne said. “Put your fingers against the glass.”

Ash walked up beside her and was close enough to the glass that the only thing in his
peripherals were Ariadne and the clouded edges of the windowpanes. The sea expanded before
him and the light of the lighthouse fired into it like a lonely lantern in a dark forest looking for a
hand.

“Do you see a boat out there?” Ash said. He attempted to squint and put his face forward,
but he forgot about the panel and bumped into it. Ariadne laughed lightly.

“I think so. Is it really far out and to the right?”

“No, it’s not that far and it’s to the left. But I think I see the one on the right too. It’s a lot
farther.”

“I see it,” Ariadne said.

The two of them stood there with their hands pressed against the glass for a long time.
And a quiet anxiety settled into Ariadne’s stomach that was certainly nausea because she knew—
primordially—that this Drift was different. So she stepped away from the glass and did
something that Dorian always asked people to do—lean in. She started spinning again and the
room became a rush of stars that looked like falling sugar. And she span.

At some point Ash started spinning too. And when Ariadne stopped, she catapulted
forward and stubbornly grabbed onto a desk to support herself. Its legs screeched against the
floor. Ash stopped too but he did it more gracefully.

They were nearly at opposite ends of the room and they felt a link between them. And
there was the journal that came toppling from somewhere else and it plopped to the floor exactly
in the middle. Ariadne’s first reaction was to look up—had someone removed one of those
dreadful panels from the ceiling and crawled in? But all the panels were in place.

A journal—right there. Where did it come from? Old worn scratched leather binding, the
stuff of ages. It struck that beautiful balance between looking like it would fall apart at the
lightest touch and weathering the strongest storms, be they the shaking hand of tears or the sharp
drops of a typhoon. Did it come flying from the sky?

“Are you up there, Dorian? Are you there and we can’t see you? Do something if you’re
there. Move a desk,” Ariadne said. She and Ash looked around the room reluctantly.

“He’s not a damn ghost, Ariadne,” Ash said.

And then Ariadne picked the journal up.

“Are you opening it?” Ash’s blood rose up in his body and his neck veins popped.

“What do you think?” Ariadne said, wrapping her fingers around the leather knot binding
the journal.

Ash catapulted over a desk and did something he had never done before. He wrestled
Ariadne to the floor. The floorboards bent and warped under their kerfuffle, but I assure you, it
was more dangerous than that. Ash clawed the journal and Ariadne held on with all her force.
The brawl ended with a swift, lucky kick into Ash’s lower stomach. He sputtered on the floor.

The desks were scattered, and one of them toppled over in a splintering crash.

Ariadne got up, breathing hard. Adrenaline coursed through her fingers, making them
light. “What the hell did you do that for?” Ariadne was shocked, a rare occurrence. Ash had
never lunged at her before. He was rarely physical.

“I don’t know. I don’t want to see what’s inside that journal,” Ash said. “It’s Dorian’s
journal. Can’t you tell?”
“Of course, I can.”

And she could.

The problem with the journal. This was always Dorian’s problem. Is that only one person can write in it at any given time. Well—two or three people could write in it, but it would be awkward, it would destroy the ritual of writing. He once claimed that only when he was writing in the journal was he able to Drift.

“If my writing is in here, we could prove it’s his. That time he tried to get me to write in it,” Ariadne said.

Ash pulled the toppled desk onto its legs and sat on it. He still gave short breaths like he’d just finished a race but they were dying down a little.

“Fine,” he said. “Look inside. Confirm its Dorian’s journal—even though we already know.”

Dorian once asked Ariadne to write in it while she was in Mr. Larson’s class so she could experience the Drift. She agreed. And so, with all the trust in the world that belonged to Dorian in that journal—he told her not to look at anything but the bookmarked page—she took it to Mr. Larson’s class and wrote in it and she never Drifted. Dorian told her all the signs. Nausea. Swirling water. Gradual change in temperature. A feeling of profound difference even when things look the same at first.

Windows. You always have to look at the windows.

And so Ariadne took the journal to the windows where the stars were giving light and the refracted glare of the lighthouse afforded some visibility. Ash did not follow her.

She opened it. As people do when they want to read something and they know how to read. Dorian had bookmarked her a page somewhere near the middle of the journal and she had
to skim the pages to find the one she wrote on. And when she did the whole world turned upside
down.

Because Ariadne had written the entry upside down. Written when Dorian was unsure
what mechanism allowed for the Drifting.

The words were.

*I can’t make this work.*

“It’s his journal,” Ariadne said.

“Of course, it is.”

“We broke into this room. We have Dorian’s journal. And we’re still Drifting.”

“Does your stomach still hurt?”

Ariadne felt her stomach misbehaving. She nodded gravely. The grave part emerged from
the slow realization that this Drift was different from past ones Dorian described. This one
wasn’t ending. This one felt different—not to mention that Ariadne and Ash had never managed
to do it before. And it busted one of Dorian’s great laws—no two people could Drift at once. It
interrupted the ritual of writing, the act of writing. Dorian could only ever Drift when the ideas
were flowed out of his fingers and through a pen’s ink, spilling on the page.

“We wait it out,” Ash said. “We sit here. And we wait it out. We wait until it’s over.”

He was splayed out on three desks now. Like planks floating about the calm sea on a day
of blistering darkness.

“We wait it out,” Ariadne said. She walked up to Mr. Larson’s desk and plopped the
journal down. “What kind of grade do you think Mr. Larson would give him for it?”

“Did you ever read his stories?”
“He refused to share them,” Ariadne said as she walked up to some desks on the other side of the room and laid on them, mimicking Ash’s pose. “This is so uncomfortable.”

“If I’m honest, you kicked me so hard it still hurts. I don’t want to stand.”

Ariadne didn’t apologize.

IX

When Daisy smells the sea in the gymnasium that’s been converted into a dance—

The lights go out. Natasha keeps on dancing because that’s what happens when the lights go out in a school. And the music sputters off. Surrounded by friends when the lights go out and it’s like returning to a time before lights—a time when school wasn’t so heavily structured and designed to make someone money along the way. When the lights go out it means that the concrete and brick and stone and mud walls—probably not mud—would crumble and grass would sprout up out of the one foot by one foot tiles on the floor and the classroom would become a vegetable garden where the children of no light cultivate a new life.

And Natasha keeps on dancing. Daisy has a strange feeling that prickles the skin on the back of her neck and then her right eye twitches too. People stop dancing because the fantasia of no light fades quickly and then no light means something sinister. How would the vegetables ever grow if there was no light? It was night and the sun had set.

Dorian does not like the darkness of the night. Daisy hates when Dorian asks her to go to Cape Perpetua to watch the sunset because when they wander back from the stone house after the sun sets, then Dorian clings to her out of fear for the darkness, and every gnarled root on the path is the limb of some ancient monster wont to swallow them forever in its pitch.
Daisy runs straight to Mr. Larson’s room because she has a suspicion and I give her a sign that it is right. She knows it’s where Dorian will have gone. He always goes there for lunch. She stops at the stairs leading to the second floor outside of the gym and thinks of going back inside. Thinking about him eating lunch in that room alone. Sitting in there in the darkness—she doesn’t want to see that. She will just meet him after the darkness ends and then nothing will change and the mushroom will be revealed and that’s how this will be. She knows this feeling is more hopeful than it is truthful.

She goes up the stairs and catches a glimpse of the sea outside of the windows to the west. The water is a strange blue. Because the school is Drifting—tonight is the night. And her theories were reinforced—Dorian always Drifted in Mr. Larson’s English classroom.

“Are you in there, Dorian?” Daisy says through the shattered window above the door handle that belongs to the door adjoining the English hallway and Mr. Larson’s classroom.

“Not here, Daisy” Ash says.

“Where is he?” Her words shuttle out of her mouth with urgency. “Why is the window broken?”

Ash lets out a deep breath and sits up. Hunches over. Staring out of the window.

“He’s not here,” Ash says. “We’re just waiting for the Drift to end.”

“We’ll find him when the Drift ends,” Ariadne echos.

Daisy opens the door from the inside out because no one bothered to unlock it. Instead of reclining on a desk, she sits in a chair at the front of the room.

“When the Drift ends the window is still going to be broken,” Daisy says.

“When the Drift ends we’ll leave and no one will ever know that we did it,” Ash says.
So the three of them sit there waiting for the Drift to end. Daisy asks how they know Dorian isn’t somewhere else, and Ash tosses the journal at her before she is ready to catch it. It pattered to the floor less gracefully than it had fallen from the ceiling—some ascendant place—and she flicked through it and was understood.

Daisy does not like Ariadne or Ash. She believes they treat Dorian like an accessory, someone who can entertain when the moments are dull, but when the real stuff emerges, they aren’t there. Daisy was the one to comfort Dorian when he was alone. She did not routinely make fun of him for liking mushrooms. Perhaps they are only his siblings. And that is growing up.

Daisy does not have siblings and cannot see it that way.

Ariadne has said not one thing since Daisy entered the room. And that’s because she does not like Daisy and she is good at ignoring people.

It has been fifteen minutes since Daisy walked into the room and perhaps thirty minutes since the Drift began when they start to hear screaming. The short and exasperated and shocked kind. The muffled kind, the urgent kind. The infectious kind. Pairs of feet trample down the hall and a young student even pokes his head through the glass.

“The Drift hasn’t ended yet,” Ash says. “How long was the longest Drift Dorian ever talked about?”

“Five minutes. Max,” Ariadne breaks her silence.

None of it makes much sense. Of course the Drifting has never made sense in the first place. It started a few years back, at the beginning of high school, and Dorian talked about it off and on. Sometimes months went by when he didn’t talk about it, then it happened a lot. All at once, bouts of it, like an illness that flares up in moments of weakness. When it got really intense
is when he tried to spread it. At first he only told Daisy. Then he told Ash and Ariadne. No one else knew about the Drifting.

Minutes pass. More than minutes. The three of them shift and finally Daisy leaves, so Ash and Ariadne can breathe deeply again. Soon people stop screaming and the sky returns to a normal color. Ash feels for the star in his pocket and feels nothing.

“Things are going to be different,” Ariadne says.

“The Drift isn’t going to end,” Ash says.

X

Ash goes to school—the first day—a year later and Ariadne drives their beat-up Ford Meteor instead. Stored in his backpack in a safe pouch is Dorian’s journal. After school, he and Ariadne go to work.

Across from the Luna Sea House is the Drift Inn. Ash watches Ariadne through the little porthole windows with a coffee carafe in hand, serving it to people after their huckleberry cobbler. Sometimes they look at each other through the windows.

There’s a magical land somewhere, farther than a street’s width, and Dorian is there. It is so far away it can only be imagined, arrived at during an unlikely and curious daydream. People speak languages there, guttural and soft and everything in between. There are two suns, not one, and they’re equidistantly far.

Ash is waiting for the sudden sunset. Ariadne is too.

Enough time has passed so that Ash doesn’t think about Dorian as much anymore. He only thinks about him when it’s dark and he’s all eyes looking for too long, when the fog begins
to take shape, when the little mushroom heads wriggle out of the ground and are low enough that
the grass covers them like strands of newborn hair. He doesn’t think about Dorian much
anymore. When Ariadne smiles and he forgets that someone can look like someone else because
you want them to, when the stars remind you of the star you grabbed out of the sky because the
darkness doesn’t always seem so far, when the coffee gets cold and sits at the bottom waiting for
heat.