

Mr. Shaw is such a mean man. Even his classroom is mean. There is nothing on the eggshell colored walls or bookshelves, just a white board complete with two black markers and one eraser. On the left side of the room, from our perspective, sits his mahogany desk and burgundy leather rolling chair. The only items on his desk are the text book for our class, a monthly calendar that he writes on profusely, three pencils and six pens that sit in his black plastic pen holder and one photograph of his family. This artifact, the photograph, is the one anomaly to the ogre that is Mr. Shaw; more like the fact that he has one. It is an ongoing mystery. How can someone so cold and callous have a family? But sure enough, Mr. Shaw is married with three children and a dog. I only know this because one day I was dared by Andrew to walk up to his desk and ask a question. You see, we don't do that. We ask our questions from the safety of our seats and wait patiently for him to call on us. He didn't get mad, but answered my question with a snarky tone and look...which is somehow much worse. I know what you're thinking and it's not one of those "I'm only mean when I'm a teacher" things. His oldest son, Matthew Shaw is in our class and he treats his own son as horribly as he treats us. Matthew is barely passing the class and has even been written up for tardies at least six times this semester. We all feel bad for the guy, but not bad enough to talk to him. It's not that I don't like him, he's cute and nice, but he's Mr. Shaw's son...what do you say to him, "Sorry your dad is hated by everyone and no one will talk to or hangout with you because you are his kin?" Not awkward at all.

Mr. Shaw looks up at us as we sit quietly waiting for instruction. His eyes unfocus for a brief moment and then he looks at all of us, individually. This is how he takes attendance. He rises from behind his desk and stands in front of it. He looks at no one, just the clock on the back wall.

"Mr. Craven. You'll make your speech first." Mr. Shaw has chosen the first victim of the day. Andrew gives me a look, and then winks and stands up. Seeing Mr. Shaw stand next to Andrew is hilarious. Andrew is at least a foot taller than him and Mr. Shaw has his green suspenders and tweed dress pants on today. He only wears those when he's in extra failing mode, or exam/speech day.

Andrew begins his speech:

Good Morning. Good morning indeed. My fellow students, no, my friends, there is too much expected from us. We are looked upon to write papers, speeches, conduct research and give aural presentations as well as a play-by-play of our process to our instructors. We work hard, we are plagued with anxiety, some of us even so stressed that we need medication, and when we turn in our assignments we are told—you have failed because of plagiarism. Or, and this is my personal favorite, "you have not followed the proper MLA format". This is unfair. How are we

supposed to not plagiarize when we learn the information from the text books, or internet articles or from our teachers, right here in this very school. Millions have studied the same information and yet I am supposed to recap said information in my own words? The odds of that are astronomical! There is no way that my take on this information is going to be an original thought, the information isn't even original. Oh, and the MLA Format. You mean the snubbing of personal creativity. MLA and APA have been used for decades. It's the idea of a format that I detest the most. Writing with so many rules and guidelines are suffocating to our youth. And if they do not want us to plagiarize, stop giving us the same information over and over. Stop having us all write the same way, stop using the same format used when writing the original source. It is my belief that we should have freedom when it comes to writing papers and speeches. We should be able to utilize our minds and resources in our distinctive technique. We don't think the same way, so why should we write the same way? Thank you.

I can't believe he just did that. Andrew makes his way back to his seat next to me as a procession of applause rings out. Mr. Shaw is unimpressed, but Andrew's speech met the requirements—it was 1 to 5 minutes, spoke directly to his audience and addressed an issue with a resolution. I gawk at him and he winks again and gives me his slick smirk. His speech clocked in at exactly two minutes and fourteen seconds. Mr. Shaw was watching the clock the entire time. Andrew knows that he will get a 'C' for the assignment, a passing grade. The speeches continue and I am beginning to get nervous.

"Mr. Shaw." He calls his son's name, his name, with boredom and an undertone of disappointment. But Matthew is never nervous in his father's presence, like the rest of us. He must be used to this form of treatment. He walks to the front of the class and has his note cards in his right hand. Taking a quick breath, he starts his speech:

Good morning. As the economy improves, we are beginning to see the return of many beloved aspects to the American culture. There has been a rise in ticket sales for sports such as hockey and Jai-Ali. Not to mention our produce is thriving and gas prices haven't been this low in over six years. There is one art form that has not received aid and is struggling, the theatre. Now this may be extended from the stage to the movie screen, even the radio. However, theatre for the stage is struggling to maintain its presence in our society. Why should we preserve the theatre? What important role does it play in our society? It plays a vital role to our society. This generation is all about satire. Theatre created satire and drama, comedy, tragedy, romantic comedy, the list is endless. Without theatre, shows like SNL and Key and Peele would not exist. We should preserve theatre because as new shows are written, they are becoming more realistic. Theatre has always reflected the time period it is in and has subconsciously created living history for future generations to learn from. They are, in essence, our visual archives and the last standing connection we have to the ancient Greeks and the Elizabethan era. To let this art form and intimate form of connection between actor and audience dissipate would be the utmost irresponsible act we can do for our children and their children. If the government does not want to help protect our history, then we can. We can support new and rising composers, write and

produce our own works, and oversee fundraisers and charity events that donate the proceeds to local community theatres and schools. We can also support the classic world of Broadway by going to see productions, even if they are student rushed. The best way to get theatre back on its feet is to act. Thank you.

Wow. I had no idea Matthew was so interested in theatre. He plays my opposite, Kenickie, in *Grease*, but he never seemed to be an advocate for it. His speech was very inspiring, not that this class would listen to him or his cause, even if he wasn't Mr. Shaw's son. Still, we are all clapping for him and as he passes me, I smile politely. Matthew smiles back in his eyes blink rapidly, in surprise. The applause settles down and the class waits for Mr. Shaw to speak again. There are still ten speeches left and we know they will bleed onto Monday, giving nine lucky people more time. His eyes are on his son and he writes something down on his calendar. Whatever he's writing, is a mini-novel, after two minutes, he finally he calls on someone, me. We have exactly 5 minutes before class ends. I shakily stand and make my way to the front, right next to Mr. Shaw's desk, all the while wishing that this ordeal was over and that the bell would just ring already. I turn to face my classmates, take a deep breath and the bell rings. Wait....what?

"Thank you Miss Adler, such a riveting speech, well supported and executed. You can all use Miss Adler as an example for quality work on future assignments. No homework today, I'll see you all on Monday." Mr. Shaw is actually smiling. He has said nothing but our names the entire class period. Plus, I don't think my speech was better than Matthew's. Nodding to him slightly, I smile weakly and head to my desk as people are cheering for me and applauding louder than they did for Andrew who is giving me a standing ovation and beaming. Matthew smiles at me again, but there is slight tension around his eyes. I think I know why, he's thinking, "What does she have that I don't or didn't have in my speech?" I reach our desks and grab my notebook and pencils. Andrew and I make our way out the door and towards the first floor for Spanish III. I'm still so lost. I didn't even get a word out. In a daze I walk alongside Andrew until we reach room 807. Mrs. Costello isn't in the room yet, so we are waiting outside in the hallway and it means that I have a few minutes to talk to Andrew about my speech.

"Andrew, what happened in Mr. Shaw's class? I was about to start my speech when the bell rang and you were all clapping. I don't know if I can ever erase the image of him smiling at me. It was so creepy." Everything came out in a rush, and I am out of breath waiting for an explanation.

"Evy, you gave your speech, it was awesome." He is staring at me with confusion and a fraction of concern on his face. He knows and hates how self doubting I can be, but this isn't like that.

"But that's just it, I didn't give my speech. I was about to and then it was over." I'm so lost, maybe I was just on some sort of performer's high. Equal to a runner's high, when you just run and run and before you know it, you've finished the race. I was in the zone, an adrenaline rush, causing me to forget making my speech completely.

“Evy, no, you gave your speech. It was about being able to use our tablets, cell phones, and laptops in class for notes. About how it’s allowed in college, and since they like to treat us as though we are attending a university, we should have that luxury too. It was epic.” He says that last part with pride in his voice.

I am at a loss for words. That *was* what my speech was about, but why don’t I remember giving it? “How long was it...my speech, what was my time?” I have to try to make sense of this.

“It was four and a half minutes.” He looks at his watch and decides to sit down. I join him, still puzzled. Four minutes and thirty seconds. That’s what I clocked in when I practiced last night. But four minutes doesn’t just escape your mind, right? Whatever, Andrew is bored of this topic and so am I. “At least the ogre seemed to like it, maybe then he’ll give me an *A* for once instead of a *B+*. I’m so sick of almost getting an *A*. He is the only *B* I’ll get this semester.” I try subtly to change the subject.

“Yeah, he was eating it up. It was a scary thing to witness.” Andrew smiles and then laughs. I join him, remembering Mr. Shaw’s crinkly eyed smile. The final bell rings and a substitute walks up to our classroom door. She is short with pale skin and dangerous curves. She has very straight black hair that goes all the way down to the small of her back and big gray eyes that sit in her small face which is nearly hidden by her enormous harlot red glasses that match her harlot red lipstick. She is wearing a black collard button down blouse and tight black jeans with red wedge heels. On any other day, I’d think she was a strange new student, but her visitor sticker gives her away. She’s pretty, but there is an aspect to her that pulls you away from her looks, I don’t think she is aware of how gorgeous she is, I think she’s a bit of a nerd. A nerd that grew into her own and is now oblivious.

“Good morning class, sorry I’m late. Your teacher is out sick for the week so I’ll be filling in for you...no wait, for her. Okay, let’s take attendance.” Her voice is so mousy, like a small child. It’s cute but I don’t think I’ll be able to take it for more than a week.

“Excuse me, but you want to take attendance before we enter the classroom?” Andrew asks Minnie Mouse. It makes sense; I mean why would she take attendance out in the hallway. She’s not even carrying a clip board, how does she know our names, does she know our names?

“Oh, right! I’m so sorry. This might be a really bad thing to tell you guys, but this is my first time subbing.” And bless her, she hangs her head in the air and blushes as she unlocks and opens the door. The moment her back is turned, ten out of the eleven guys in my Spanish class push their way towards the front of the line to enter the classroom, all of them trying to “discreetly” take pictures of her, well of the back of her. The only guy that stays behind and allows the ladies to enter the classroom first is Andrew. The girls look on in revulsion; whether it’s from the lack of tact on the guys’ part or the fact that they have new and unwanted “competition,” I’m just not sure. Either way, Jenni Hensley and Taryn DiMartino are not happy. They would be the hottest girls in the junior class, currently dating Jason Desner (senior and quarterback of the Varsity

Football team) and Kevin Caler (also a senior and Point Guard on the Varsity Basketball team) who are not only leading the pack of feral teenage boys into the classroom, but are seemingly ogling over the new substitute and here is the key word, *teacher*. They don't stand a chance. What is it about guys thinking that every woman *they* think is hot will go for them? Sure, she can't be much older than us, but why would she risk her uncertain livelihood on you? She would go to jail whether it was consensual or not, honestly these guys are so daft.

Everyone sits in their usual spots. Andrew and I are, as always, in the back as far away from the door as the dimensions of the room will permit, it helps to avoid the rush at the end of class. I wonder what Mrs. Costello has? She seemed fine yesterday. She's one of my favorite teachers at this school. It's funny because she actually isn't Spanish or of any Latin origin. Her family is from Wisconsin and before that, Scotland. She married a Bolivian man and decided to learn Spanish before they had children. They've been married for fifteen years now and have four kids, none of which speak the language. So, she decided to put it to good use and became a Spanish teacher. She really is an amazing teacher too, I'm almost fluent. I became so fascinated with the idea of speaking another language and blew through all of the course work for three of her Spanish classes in my freshman year. So even though I am taking Spanish III, she gives work that would be in Spanish VII if the school offered the course. Drifting back to the now, I see that Minnie Mouse has decided to pass around a sheet of paper that we will write our names on. She has also written her name on the board. Mrs. Katie Dannin. Oh, I missed the wedding ring. Maybe now the guys will stop. She must be very newly married and not from around here because most married women here do not dress or look like her. They leave that up to us, they say that we are just trying to find our way. In other words to all of the girls in high school it means anything goes...just not something that flat out says I'm a tramp, it has to suggest that I'm a tramp. The same goes for guys except they try for the lazy/comfortable look.

"Once the attendance sheet is done, please bring it to the tea—I mean my desk. I'll be honest with you guys, Mrs. Costello didn't leave any work for you to do today, so it's fine with me if you guys chill for the hour and then next week I'll bring in a movie. I guess you'll get points for just showing up or something. But seriously guys, I don't want to get in trouble for too many of you leaving the class or lollygagging around in the halls. So if you are actually going to the bathroom, go and come back. Think about it, a whole 90 minutes to chill. You can listen to your music or play on your tablets or whatever else you want, just don't leave. I'm going to check on my fantasy football team and maybe do a little online shopping." Yep, she is definitely not from around here and she is definitely a newlywed. She sits down behind Mrs. Costello's desk and seemingly tunes us out. The class looks on silently for another beat and then breaks off into conversation. The boys have lost interest and are either apologizing to their girlfriends or are on their phones playing games or on the various forms of social media.

Since we have the whole class to do nothing, I decide to take out my notes for math and study for the test that I have next period. It sucks because that is also lunch hour. We will have 45 minutes to get as much done as possible, then we break for lunch and come back with 5 minutes left to

take the test and then we spend the rest of the class working on the next lesson. Have I mentioned that even though I am great at it, I hate calculus? Andrew takes one look at my notebook, rolls his eyes and then takes his out too. I smile and review my answers from the homework last night. He may not like to admit it, but I have had a profound effect on him. And secretly, he cares about his grades. Yes he is on the basketball team so he must maintain at least a 2.5 grade point average, but there is a reason why he has a 3.94 GPA. He's so close to a 4.0 and I know he wants it, plus we are still in our junior year, so he's got the time.

My studying is going well and I am just about to check my notes from three chapters ago when I hear something strange. It's a muffled sound, like someone... a woman talking. I wouldn't have thought anything about it if the classroom hadn't been completely silent, and the woman said my name, that I heard very clearly. I freeze and look to my left. To my surprise, Andrew meets my gaze. Was he staring at me? I look at his desk and see a drawing of my face in his notebook. He quickly flips the pages to the first page of notes, back to math problems. Twice in one day I have seen Andrew get nervous. His ears are pink and he mumbles an apology and hovers over his notes. I frown at his profile and return my focus back to studying. The silence drones on and the muffled female voice makes its way to the very back of my mind.

When I have gone through my math notes three times, the bell finally rings. I grab my belongings and rise, waiting for Andrew. It is only then that I've noticed he's dozed off. I see his notebook is open back to the drawing of me. It's really good. He's such a good artist, I wish he'd pursue it, but I know he won't. Then it dawns on me, he drew my face when the only thing he could see was my profile. He drew the portrait from memory. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, if I could draw half as well as him, I'd draw his face perfectly from memory too. There is only one way to wake Andrew up. Gently, you must gently wake him or he will go crazy on you and potentially hit you. That is how I got my first and hopefully last, black eye. I stretch my hand out and slowly rub his back in gentle circles. After the third rotation, he jumps and quickly blinks up at me sleepily. He always looks so innocent when he sleeps and wakes up. For a moment longer than it should have been, our eyes lock. It feels like we are both searching for something. He's got these beautiful hazel eyes. I always try not to stare at them for too long, but the truth of it all is that I could get lost in them. His irises are just so interesting and change colors depending on the light or his mood. Right now they are an ocean blue color and as you look closer to the pupils, they melt into this light brownish, coral color and then a thick ring of a leafy green. Three colors, it's breathtaking. His eyes dilate and that's what pulls me away.

"Hey sleepyhead, we have to get to calculus. Do you want your midmorning snack now or after gym? If you want it now, we will have to make a beeline for our lockers." Now *my* ears are turning pink. I can't look at him, so I choose to look at my notebook instead, waiting for his reply.

"I think I'm good, let's just go to calculus and get this god awful test out of the way." He looks disappointed, but it seems like it's more than our test that's got him down. A lot of things seem

to have a double meaning with him lately. Either I am slowly turning into my mother or he is keeping something from me.

He stands now and grabs his things. Holding the door open for me, we head out of the 800's building and journey to the farthest area on campus: the portables or 8-Mile as we like to call them. They are across the vast courtyard, past the ROTC building and go as far as the gate separating the school from the highway. It is a nice day outside. The sun is shining but it's not completely unbearable, probably in the latter half of the 70's. Of course, that will change by the time we get to 8-Mile. The walk is so long that we are usually drenched in sweat and then freezing once the 8-Mile AC kicks in. Andrew and I walk in silence and the closer we get to Mr. Crippen's portable the worse I feel. This is the only class we have with Laura. I like her, I do. She's funny and nice, but there is just something telling me she isn't my friend. It's sort of like she tolerates me for some unknown reason. She doesn't have to hang out with me; I certainly don't ask her to. I strongly feel like it's to get closer to Andrew, but she rarely hangs out with him alone if she does at all. The three of us only truly hang out together during lunch, my birthday and after basketball games. I don't think Andrew likes her... no, I know he doesn't like her. He hasn't said it out right, but when she is around, he completely ignores her. He has however, said countless times that he thinks she's dumb. I used to try to defend her, but now I just shrug, I don't like arguing with him and it's always at an inconvenient time.

If I can be frank, she does say stupid things like one of those people from *The Jersey Shore*. It makes it very difficult to defend someone who can't remember if it was Emily Dickinson or Hellen Keller that wrote the "epic poem" which became the premise for the romantic comedy *Love Actually*. That particular incident was fueled by her complaint about failing her term paper. Her topic would have been interesting, but her information and key points were based on opinions and fictional fact. Andrew just got up and threw out his lunch tray, which still had food on it, something that only happens when he is angry or sickened, in this case I think it was both. I just stared at her, waiting for the punch line. When it didn't come, I politely explained who wrote the poetry, who wrote the screenplay, and that she was probably thinking of Jane Austen who wrote the book *Pride and Prejudice*, and how it became a movie that had a lot of the *Love Actually* cast members in it. I think she just lacks the filter between the brain and your mouth; she just doesn't think before speaking. Later that evening I found myself trying to justify the mistake to him, but my attempts were feeble, the similarities between the two were scarce. We'd gotten so annoyed at each other that I developed a headache and Andrew didn't speak to me for the rest of the evening. The truth is, I'm tired of her, but I don't know how you tell someone to stop hanging out with you. Since we only have one more year left, I figure we could just tough it out. Or perhaps she'll get bored or a boyfriend over the summer and not bother to hang out with us.

We finally reach portable 61. Poor Mr. Crippen has been moved four times already this year. First it was mold, then there were the rodents, mold again, and the last time there was no ram or reason. He keeps a cosmic cardboard box under his desk now, just in case. I think it's

emblematic in some way because he has been moved to the outermost portable in 8-Mile, if I were him I'd just start looking for a job elsewhere. I can't imagine why they'd fire the man, he's a nice guy and an engaging teacher, and it's the subject we don't like. It's true, he does fail the most students out of all the other teachers, but that is because people take his class and don't follow through with the work. Entering the classroom, we see that no one else has arrived yet. There is still four minutes left but I wouldn't be surprised if half the class of fifteen didn't show up. It's test day. The only class I will ever sit in the front for is Mr. Crippen's. He goes so quickly and sometimes you can miss important information. So the two, sometimes three front middle seats are occupied by Andrew, me and sometimes Laura. My cellphone buzzes in my pocket and I take it out to see who is texting me. It's Laura...of course, test day.

**Hey E, I won't be in class today. Test day, you know. But can you do me a favor? Can you write down the hardest questions for me? Thnx* Text message from Laura Simone at 11:52A.M.*

She knows I don't like to cheat. I delete the text message, planning to fane bad cell reception later. Besides, she didn't even remember that it's my birthday. No. She will just have to study like everyone else. Plus, she is taking a day off, she'll be alright. Andrew takes his phone out too and quickly scans what I assume is Laura covering her tracks and asking him too; though why she'd expect him to help her, I will never know. "So what did Laura send you?"

He glances at me and says, "I am NOT helping that idiot. I don't even know how she made it into this class. I'm telling her no. She knows I don't like her. I think she's fake and hides behind mommy and daddy's money. I wouldn't help her if she paid me." The irritation in his tone is chilling. He replies to her text quickly. When he's finished he places his phone back into his pocket and looks satisfied with himself. He's finally said it outright, he does not like her. The final bell rings, signaling the start of third period and the beginning of A-Lunch.