



## Track A: Loneliness and Belonging

By Corey Briska

It was yesterday. No, it was five years ago. I cannot help but process these things inappropriately. At the time, I was lonely. Lonelier than I have ever been. Listening to him speak was a nightmare. He would always drone on about finding your passion, looking good to others, but I couldn't listen. I could never listen. And that was my problem. When my mind wandered, I would become forever lost in my dreams. Idealism not pragmatism.

He told me that being brave did not consist of talking but doing. He told me being alive was looking at yourself in the mirror and embracing the mundane. I knew that to be true. In his words, I saw a vast escape, but also one of solace and memory. As time went on, I realized my beliefs were forsaken and still I couldn't shake my loneliness. That emptiness stuck with me.

We were in the locker room after practice. He told me to get lost. I forgot he said that. I almost cried, if it were not for me looking up to him. His eyes told a story. One that went on indefinitely. In his eyes, he seemed to seek glory like the kings of old. Nevertheless, I asked him to go on a hike with me that weekend. He agreed.

On the trail, we walked along the narrow and tortuous path. His appearance was sordid, but for a moment, I wasn't too sure of that judgment. As we sat behind the trees, I looked through him again. Now, I saw a man who was beautiful and radiant. At that time of year, he looked out to the horizon, and said to me, this was the best view for miles. The orchids were candescent. I could give him that. He continued to lecture me, and I could listen for days. Still, I told him it was getting late, and we should go. Seeing his

eyes made me never want to leave. They were constantly incongruent with his feelings. But at the end of the day, the sun only stays in the sky for so long.

Back on the trail, we walked for moments lost. In the time we needed, the sun rebounded up and down. Finally, the sun sank into the meadows around us. I looked into his eyes once more before we left. His apathetic head hung low on his shoulders as he sighed. We parted ways. I could feel loneliness sinking in, but in my loneliness, I had a certain moment of peace, and in that moment of respite, my feelings of color appeared again. I think I can say that with certainty.

At school the next day, I saw him. He didn't say a word to me. I made up a fake scenario for him, where we were back on the trails like nothing ever happened. We would laugh, and he would tell me about the world. But I was living a lie. I couldn't keep up with my uncertainty. It made my mind spin a thousand times over. Nevertheless, I would still look into his eyes.

After the day was over, I confronted him in the hallway. The whole interaction seemed off. He seemed distant, almost lost. He didn't say much. I didn't say much. I walked away replaying that situation over and over in my mind. In my moment of hopelessness, I looked back at myself while simultaneously looking through myself. At a time of great introspection, I saw a beautiful horizon. One with a trail and a meadow. Sweet grass and serene feelings. The sun receding in the distance. But I knew the day was over.

At home, I ate dinner just like any other day. I believed that the new age had failed me in some particular way. Looking past my thoughts, I finished my nightly ritual of being listless and walked to the bathroom to brush my teeth. I thought of him one more time as I looked into the mirror. Staring at myself, I realized that this time, I am the one to continue this exploration and to stop trying to seek glory like the kings of old.

Hi! My name is Corey Briska, and I am a first year medical student. I am originally from a small town in Wisconsin. I love creative writing and all of the arts. My creative writing includes fiction specifically short stories and novels. I am currently working on a short story! My fun fact is that I was born on Christmas.