

I kept a steady pace. My feet slapped the cold, gray sidewalk with every step I took. I could hear the gravel crunching under my feet. Mother Nature brought a rimy day. The trees were hunched over, withering. Frost covered the point of each blade of grass. The brisk air rushed past me compelling what was left of the trees, to dance. All around, it was the feeling of winter: the feeling of affliction.

I zipped up my jacket. My grandmother got it for me, for Christmas. I remember her saying, "The world is a cold place, unless you have a warm heart." She was a major influence in my life. Owning a world-class travel agency, she always had lots of money. She got me everything I own. She was there for me. My mom has been in lockup for the last nine years. As for my dad, who knows? He left when I was four. All I remember is the door opening, me thinking he came back, and finally realizing who it was: Child Services.

I kept walking. I was almost there; the bus stop was another block and I couldn't be late for school. One more tardy and I earn myself another detention. My parole officer said if I get in trouble at school anymore, I wouldn't be able to play sports during the summer. I had three more months on parole. My one year anniversary with my girlfriend was in three months. I'd be with her, if I hadn't attempted to steal a beer and try to sell dope. Two months left until school lets out, I could make it. I saw the bus. I began to sprint. My music kept me awake so I could make it in time. I was starting to feel light-headed. I hadn't eaten breakfast this morning, so I was running low on energy. I figured when I get to school, I'd ask William if he had his energy drink with him; I'd ask him for a swig.

When I got on the bus, I picked my usual seat to sit in. I tossed my bag in the corner and slumped right into the old, blue vinyl seat. I sat in the back of the bus. I always found myself to be a little cooler than usual. I remember last year, everybody had to fight for a seat in the back, but now, being a sophomore, I wasn't fresh meat. Besides, after kissing up to the seniors for a couple of years, you earned your way back there. Same old bus, with the same gum from last year, stuck under the same deficient seat.

I began to stare out the window and survey the street. The white lines, I noticed, aren't straight like I thought they were. I pulled out my black pen and composition book and began to write. I liked to make raps and give them to my friend, Adam for revision. He was the king of rapping. My friends call it *free styling*, where they come from. I couldn't think of anything to write. My mind went blank. Eminem was playing in my head. *Cinderella Man* was my favorite. He was always handin' out love "By the grace of God." Hey! That was his line. Then, my head popped and it all started to pour out; liquid gold started to flow from my pen and create a masterpiece full of golden lyrics.

We were caught in traffic. My watch read: 7:52. School started at eight and I couldn't be late for English, we had a test. It was about literary devices. I loved those things. Then I remembered I forgot to study. "Shoot!" I cursed. I have a D in his class; this was the one test that could bump my grade up to a C. I left my study guide in my locker. Then, it came to me. I'll take some of Eminem's lyrics and analyze them for literary devices. I started to write down the lyrics and decided it was a bad idea. Why not do it to mine, instead?

I stared at the lyrics, dumbfounded. All I had was:

*I lay down my lyrics like I slap down my spades. I'm handin' out love and you're settin' off grenades. Don't you think what-you-give out, has to be handmade? I think different, cuz it results in the balance of the trade. Ever since yesterday, People don't-look-at-me the same, they say I like to navigate, to your tattoo...which is on my heart, and yes it reads your name. Don't invade, my only space, that I have to beat freely, Can't you feel the upbeat vibe? That's the sound of you and me, ideally.*

The bus started to move again. I couldn't help but talk to myself.

"Alright, when I compare with "like", I get a smile...oh, simile. When I...what was an exaggeration?" I was almost sure I was going to flunk this test. I asked somebody in front of me what time it was. I felt stupid; I had a watch on my wrist. I was so worried

about the time I had left, I forgot about the time I was wasting. I decided to keep trying so I would at least have a chance of passing this quiz.

“When you’re hyper, you are excited, you tell stories, you lie...” I couldn’t put two and two together. How was I ever going to be like Eminem? “...you exaggerate, you...oh, hyperbole.” There was definitely no way I was going to pass this test.

For the third time that morning, I looked at my watch, it read: 7:58. My bus was in the parking lot unloading. Seat by seat, it took an endless amount of time. I finally got off of the junk-mobile and sprinted upstairs where I had only about a minute left to get to class. I opened my locker, ditched my bag, grabbed my folder for class, slammed it shut, and tore through the hallways for English. Just as Mr. Lockett locked the door, the bell had rung. I was late.

I pounded on the door. Through the window, I saw him jump. He hastily opened the door and ushered me inside the class. I found my seat waiting there for me up in the front. The first words to come out of Mr. Lockett’s mouth were, “You’re tardy, Mr. Jackson...again.” The class snickered. I slouched just a little farther than usual, in my seat. He began, “Now, last night, I am profoundly sure that most of my young scholars were up, watching the Super Bowl.”

The back part of the class responded, “Yeeeeaaaaaahhhh!”

Mr. Lockett continued, “Well, as a matter of fact, I was viewing the NASCAR race on ESPN.”

The class chuckled. Tom, an idiot from Ohio, stood up and shrieked, “Go Earnhardt!” The class sat in silence. He wasn’t much of a class clown.

“Anyhow, I have reached a conclusion. We are not taking the test on Literary Devices, today.” Mr. Lockett surprised everyone. Immediately, half of the class took out their cell phones and began to text. The other half was engaged in a semi-paper ball war. Mr. Lockett’s booming voice sounded, “BUT...” There was a dramatic pause. “But, you will write me a 500 word essay on the modern achievements made throughout hist...” The class was already moaning and groaning. Everyone hated essays. Right

now though, I hated Mr. Lockett. “I will be back to pick these up at the end of class. Turn them into the substitute.” Almost as if it were on cue, the substitute walked in while Mr. Lockett exited.

“Hello everyone, I am Ms. Wilson.” The substitute was a witch-looking blonde. We all stared at her in shock. Was she someone to mess with? Maybe not, I would be the first to find out. I couldn’t write that essay. I just simply could not. I talked myself into not doing any writing, whatsoever. I looked around the room. It seemed dark, now that Mr. Lockett left, dark tan walls, with blue curtains. It made the whiteboard look black. My emotions and worrying started to die down and were replaced with disappointment and sadness. I pulled out a sheet of paper and my pen and began to write:

*You can try to hide fears, but they don’ t go away. You thought you never made it, but today is your day. You’ re at the bottom of the food chain, already decayed. Stand up when they push you down, a smart man has something to say.*

I started to regain part of my happiness. I started to think about my mom and dad, then my uncle. I was in a room, where everything was white. The sheets, my uncle’s gown, the nurse, and even the tray she was feeding him on every day. My uncle was a rapper; people called him *C-Rock*. He was from the northern part of Compton, California. He had a lot of stuff going on. His mom was killed in a drive-by and his brother was tortured in Pakistan. My uncle slowly started to do drugs; he started with dope, slowly moving to coke and meth. At the time my mom was still suffering from her mother being killed. She started to develop a drinking problem. She was taken away from me when I was six. Dad says that she was moving, but I really knew she was in the cell. Now, I’m still here trying to stay out of trouble and play ball for a future. I’m on parole for another three months. I stole a beer from the corner store and got caught selling dope. Two months jail and 100 hours community service and now, three months left of parole with a side of a dead uncle, a jailed mom, a lost dad, and no hope.

“Hey,” I jumped, Ms. Wilson scared me. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just thinking, that’s all.” I had to hide my disinterest in this class or I would be in trouble.

“Let me see your paper.” It seemed to me that she was getting curious.

“They’re just notes...”

“Hmmm, these words don’t seem like notes. Mr. Jackson, if I may ask what have you been doing?”

There it was. She got me. I’m caught. There goes my grade, my life, future, eternity: you name it. “I’m just sitting here writing down lyr...”

She cut me off, “...ics to your rap. Yes, I know. A truthful rapper is a rapper you can relate to.”

She’s good. “How’d you know what...?”

“...I was going to say?” The old witch did it again. How does she do that? “Mr. Lockett has sent me emails and letters about how you have a consistent rhythm in your essays. He says when he checks the back of your papers, he finds these random lines. For whatever reason, he told me that he recites them in front of his bathroom mirror. I think he was flirting with me, but anyhow, he says you keep the melody.”

My mouth was beginning to open and drop. I had to swallow to keep it stable. I couldn’t believe what she was saying. I was in shock, I was paralyzed. I couldn’t move. My heart was racing against time, it was so fast. I had to say something, anything. “Thanks Ms. Wilson.” I didn’t mean choke on what I say. Gosh, I’m such a fool!

Ms. Wilson looked at me a little awkwardly. “Oh, it’s not me you should be thanking. In all honesty, I am only your teacher, he is your messenger. I’ll have you know that I am a producer in the audio department.”

“Cool,” There I go again with my words of a third grader, “I want to be like Eminem.” And there goes my knowledge level, its bad enough that my vocabulary level is sinking like a canary.

She began to chuckle. “Well, you do know that Eminem had to start somewhere. He started in high school, writing essays.”

Again, almost on cue, Mr. Lockett walked in. “Alright everyone, I will collect the essays now.”

Ms. Wilson stood over to me and handed me a card with her address and phone number on the back. “I’ll see you tomorrow at six.” She grabbed her belongings and departed.

Mr. Lockett flipped through the papers, now having all of the students’ work in his hands. He stood there a minute and then slammed them down. He knocked over his coffee cup causing it to shatter onto the floor. The class quickly quieted. He announced, “These essays will replace your Literary Devices test.” The rest of the class stared back at Mr. Lockett, wide-eyed.

I sat staring out the window. Snow was just beginning to fall. I didn’t bring my heavy coat, either; I had my gloves in my locker. If you listened hard enough, you could hear the ticking of the clock. In the distance, the sun was just beginning to set. In the distance, sirens were wailing about. “Probably an unlucky person who found another obstacle,” I thought. On the bright side, I had a meeting with an audio producer tomorrow. There were a few minutes left in class. I decided I would do the essay at home and turn it in late. So, I got up and walked over to the window and surveyed the rooftops for ice. I saw a pigeon with a hurt wing on the window sill next to this room. I began to open the window and reach for it. I then became startled when a student opened the window, looked at me, and pushed the pigeon off. I gasped; he smirked and closed the window. I followed the pigeon downwards where my eyes met a demolished, black SUV with a body protruding from the windshield, restrained by the seat belt. People were calling for help, students and administration were flailing their arms in a distraught manner, and the principal sprinted inside the building, probably for the nurse. The victim looked as if it were a woman. I stood there, frozen-like, my hands in my pockets. I pulled out a card, Ms. Wilson’s card. I looked down; a chill was instantly sent

up my spine, I began to shiver. It was the kind of shiver you get when you have the feeling of winter: the feeling of affliction. Just then, the bell rang. Class was dismissed.