

Prose Best in Show

“Soldier, Poet, King” by Savannah Coppersmith Charlevoix High School, 12th Grade

We sat around my little wooden table, speaker blasting the songs from the “Oh Hellos” as we gathered ‘round playing cards.

“So, what are you?” My friend asks.

“Well, I always thought I would be a poet or maybe the king.”

“Nooo,” she exclaims. “The quiz. Which one are you?”

I look at her quizzically, confused as to what she is alluding to. The song, “Soldier, Poet, King,” just came up. I’d never thought too much about it- I know it has become popular but to me it’s just a great song from one of my favorite bands. It dawns on me what she’s talking about as she slips her phone into my hands. “Start Quiz” staring at me as I gaze at the screen.

At first I think it’s a lighthearted quiz, then she informs me that your result is how your trauma manifests itself. That makes me a little nervous as I begin.

I recall this kid I knew from middle school. He was always falling asleep in class, and everyone assumed he just didn’t care about school. I sat by him so I tried to befriend him whenever he seemed attentive. One day while we rode the bus home I casually asked why he was always so tired, thinking he would answer with something trivial like he was up playing video games. But his eyes softened as he looked at me and he admitted that some nights he would come home and his father, “drunk as a skunk,” he told me, would come after him with a belt for some made-up slight that he blamed his son for. So my friend would sleep on the lawn, waiting till he heard the bus coming the next morning and groggily hustle aboard. That’s why most nights he would get home as late as possible, when he could sneak in unseen.

I’m not typically one for physical affection but when he began to cry I hugged him. That day instilled more empathy into me, and I understood why he would jolt awake when someone would drop something in class, or why he would flinch when someone moved too quickly.

I moved away from that town but we still talk. He lives with his mother now and he has some anger issues, and he thinks everyone is out to get him, but he’s learned to form outlets for his emotions. He designs fantastic 3D art, and when he’s really worked up he’ll go to the gym till he’s too sore to willingly get out of bed the next day.

I sent him the quiz later that night. He got soldier.

My friend, the one watching me scroll through these questions, tells me proudly that she’s a poet. Her eyes light up as she says it, and of course it’s true. She’s an artist, with stacks on stacks of lined paper, colorful sticky notes and Tul pens. She has beautiful writing that she’s always giving me to proofread. Sometimes it’s heartwarming, but it’s also the expression of a hopeless romantic, rain splattering against the window and waiting for that special one.

Yet she’s the sweetest person you’ll ever meet. She loves to adopt little plants she’ll add to her nook and she jams out to Taylor Swift on her record player, in her earbuds, anywhere she goes. I’ll never have the stomach to tell her how insane her music drives me.

Sometimes people will yell around us and she gets real quiet. She stops fidgeting and goes still, sinking into some recess of her mind where I can’t comfort her cause she stops hearing me.

She’ll crack jokes about how often she cries and how her therapist will be happy for her.

I think she first picked up a pen because she was too scared to grab the knife. I wonder if she's never put down that pen for fear of what might happen when she does. How many people are there who resorted to art because they knew they couldn't pull the trigger.

I answer the last question, hesitating a second before I click next. All the results seem appealing, but what I really want is the king, even though it probably fits what my friends joke is my god complex. My finger taps the screen, the next page loads for a second before words flash before my eyes, "The King."

I turn the screen towards my friend. She gives a wise smile like she could've guessed so.

"Psychological," she tells me.

"What?"

"Psychological, that's the kind of trauma you have,"

I don't usually trust these quizzes as being at all accurate, but it looks like there has to be some truth to them. The king, head raised high, temper resolute, qualms hidden. I can see it.

One late night I sat in the backseat, watching the street pass me by. I no longer can recall why, but my father started arguing with my step mom. They don't argue in front of me, so I was a little caught off guard. But I kept quiet as the tears fell down my face, my father's harsh voice struck something in me.

The scene brought me back to being with my then-step-father. He was a harsh alcoholic, and I used to stay awake at night listening to him yelling at my mother.

I'm learning to take things back for myself. I like to call myself a cynical romantic, for I often feel I possess a total lack of feeling thereof, yet there is a calmness and music that settles my soul.

In spite of my past, now I have a plan; I'm gonna carve out a piece of this world for myself to belong to, because if not me then who? My shoulders are burdened with many duties, but they keep me going and give me purpose. I'm no "king" but my ancestors were soldiers, poets, and kings. My story may not yet be told, but it has already begun to unfold.