



The Mercury
The Student Art &
Literary Magazine
of Gettysburg
College

Volume 2023

Article 45

May 2023

Craft Elements

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Recommended Citation

O'Hara, Emily C. (2023) "Craft Elements," *The Mercury*. Year 2023, Article 45.
Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2023/iss1/45>

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Craft Elements

Author Bio

Emily O'Hara is currently a Junior at Gettysburg College. She grew up in several places, never staying in the same state for long. She enjoys writing in a variety of forms, especially songwriting and screenwriting. Her favorite aesthetic is Dark Academia.

Craft Elements

EMILY C. O'HARA

Characters:

Leah: Blonde. So blonde that you'd assume it's box dye but it's not (at least she says it isn't). She wears tinted sunglasses that make it look like she just got back from the funeral of her dead husband who she definitely killed (vehicular manslaughter). Leah gets decent grades and studies psychology. Her dad left when she was a kid which she uses as an excuse for almost anything. Once her mom picked her up from her semester abroad with a sign that said "Welcome home from rehab, Leah!" and it was funny but I had to pretend that it wasn't.

Ally: When I met Ally she was rarely on the ground. I liked her better drunk than sober because I liked the way her eyes lit up after a couple drinks and she'd float away from me, her words somehow still reaching me despite the apparent distance between us. She told me her mom died and I felt sorry for her but it turns out this was only a metaphorical death, which she later clarified. Ally gets either terrible or perfect grades with no in between and is an English major. When I was first getting to know Ally, she always seemed slightly out of reach, one shelf too high for me, even on my tip toes.

Setting:

Frat basement. First weekend of sophomore year. Beer on the floor. A game of pong that no one, not even the players themselves, seemed invested in. Too many guys. Sweat. Stickey speakers and choppy, throbbing bass notes.

Then separately from this, separately from the rest of my life, there was Ally and Leah. My eyes landed on Ally first, radiant and approachable, though too pretty for me not to rehearse what I was going to say. Even then, Leah seemed distinctly cold. A statue; perfect and unreal. You cannot simply approach someone who is everything you've ever wanted to be, because they will see through you the way you wish you could see through others.

They were to me what I can only tragically refer to as *the real girls*,

something I had only ever been able to masquerade as but had secretly not given up on becoming. They took up space and would continue taking up space with their fully formed personalities and intriguing pasts. I, on the other hand, was a blank piece of paper, a journal with only a name written on the cover. I was a collage of *almost's* and *what if's* and I was determined, before even talking to them, to become whoever they wanted me to be.

Flash forward:

Sometimes when I walk up the steps to my building or see our names stuck to the door of our shared room I wonder what sophomore year me would think if she knew I was rooming with Ally. A wave of pride, I assume. A feeling of victory that she would want to revel in. I, however, never think too much about it because then I would have to wonder if I replaced Leah or if I am simply haunting the space she used to fill.

I remember what Leah said to Ally when we ran into her one Saturday night, her hand pressed against Ally's cheek like she was supposed to be whispering.

I never see you anymore.

Ally laughed, a careless, drunk laugh.

I could hear myself saying those same words. I could see myself reaching my hand out as far as I possibly could, and still grabbing onto nothing.

Plot:

It was her birthday and I'd forgotten to get her something as a downpayment to assure another year of friendship. So naturally I dug through my drawer and found a pair of white earrings with silver lining and thoughtlessly shoved them into a bag. *Here Leah*, I said, *I am giving you a part of myself so that you'll want to keep me in your life, as a jewel dispensary if not a friend.* She had this look in her eyes when I gave them to her as if my simple present was proof of unhinged levels of investment.

It would be days before I remembered my mom had given me those earrings as a fourteenth-birthday present.

It would be months before I fantasized about breaking into Leah's room and ransacking the place, just to get them back.

What was the last straw between Leah and Ally? I get the sense Ally was holding a lot of straws, like a bouquet of plastic flowers, until one day there just weren't any left.

Theme:

If someone didn't put a lot of thought into it they would probably say that names, like words, do not change. But names are not like words, because they are always redefining themselves. Ally and Leah were originally synonymous with hope. Soon their names split apart and I was left with two very different words. There was *Ally* who walks with me after class and *Ally* who invites me out on weekends. Then, once Leah was cut out of the picture with scissors, there was *Ally* who introduces me to all her friends, *Ally* who is listening attentively while I tell her things I thought I would never say out loud, who is going on trips with me and never getting bored of me and out at night with a flashlight helping me find the pieces of myself I thought I'd lost forever.

And then somewhere off-screen there is Leah. With her hair blonder than ever and that same indiscernible expression that made me feel like she was looking down on me despite being so much shorter. *Leah* who never once wore the earrings I gave her. *Leah* who promised to look out for me then let her guy friends walk me home. *Leah* who told people I was hitting on her every time I gave her a mild compliment, who made me feel like a puzzle piece that was never going to fit.

I used to wonder if I would still walk up to them at that party if I knew everything that was going to happen afterward. The question never took much thought. I was then, as I am now, walking up to them over and over again and accepting the cost of that decision in advance.