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Purple Mary Janes

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Purple Mary Janes

Author Bio

Sarah Parker is a member of the class of 2013. She is an English major with a Writing Concentration. Her story, "Purple Mary Janes," is one of the pieces to be selected for The Mercury fiction genre.

PURPLE MARY JANES

SARAH PARKER

What about the water cooler? Maybe it could grow arms, each section popping out of the body all the way up to the shoulders like a telescope, and it could wear a shawl and knead bread and play Chinese checkers with me. Or just hold my hand? I could invent a water cooler that sows seeds with Dad's hands, or wears Mom's black velvet gloves and plays dress up with me, or can hold a Dr. Seuss book to read me a story but really just recite a better one *sans lire*, which is a French expression I know. Another cool thing would be if I could train my hair to be like Medusa and then I could turn anyone to stone, especially when they annoy me. And when I'm at school and the teacher assigns extra subtraction, I could spin around and look at her, and she would turn all gray and rigid, and I could stand up and shout, "*C'est fini!*"

What about a map? What if everyone had a map that they kept in their lapel pocket that had little beeping lights that showed exactly where everyone else was? Each beep would sound when a person took a breath, so if you were underwater your little light wouldn't beep at all, but as soon as you came to the surface and took a big gasp of air the light would go *beeeeeeeeeep*. It would be cool to see if everyone started to breathe at the same time, kind of like how Mom said that women who live together menstruate at the same time, which is kind of icky to think about. And at sports and stuff, the beeps would be really fast, and it would sound as if the aliens were landing, or like old computers, like the first MacIntosh that took up a whole room, were revolting against their masters, like the French did in 1789. I wonder if the computers would be mad about cake too.

And, since floating is really important sometimes, wouldn't it be cool if everyone could turn into a big beach ball?

Yeah.

My first piano lesson was four weeks ago. I was extremely interested by the big old piano in the front room, and Diane thought it'd be good for me to have a "creative outlet" other than drawing tattoos on my forearm, so my first piano lesson was four weeks ago. It was nobody but me in a dingy room with an octogenarian lady who looked at me with droopy eyes, which made me uncomfortable. She asked me to sit down on the bench beside her, but I just looked at her and asked, "*Quoi?*" and didn't move, so she asked again.

"Please come sit down, love, so that we can start the lesson." She pushed the bench so that it scuddled across the floor with a little *screetch*. I just looked at her and stood in the doorway. "Don't you want to learn piano,

dear? You've got to come sit with me to learn, sweetheart." She smiled so that her loose skin crinkled up like nappa cabbage, and I knew that it was supposed to make me feel better, but it just gave me nausea like deep fried Oreos.

I told her, "I'm gerontophobic." Most people don't know what that means, so I told her, "That means old people creep me out. A lot." My last piano lesson was four weeks ago.

I wish I had my blue sharpie with me right now, because when the air gets too thin, which it probably shouldn't anymore but still it does, it sometimes helps to scribble out a nice drawing. The best tattoo I can draw is *Water Lilies* by Claude Monet, which was the same painting that hung, always tilted to the left, in our living room before everyone died. It's pretty incredible that I can draw that because there's lots of intricate lines and shapes, though no *chiaroscuro* because impressionists don't shade. Diane offered to buy me a sketch pad, and I wanted to tell her that gifts can't buy my love, but I asked if it would have vellum paper. "Whatever you want, sweetie," and she started rubbing my back, which I know was supposed to feel loving, but it just made me angry. I jumped forward away from her. "I have to go to the bathroom," I told her, when what I really wanted to say was "You're not my mom and you never will be."

Isn't it crazy to think that over two-thirds of the Earth is covered by water? The number of people, dead and living, is always going up, but the space we can live on is always the same, which is really weird. There are more people living today than there are dead in all of human history, and I guess there always will be, since population is always growing on both sides, but more on the living side I think, or at least I hope. Think how many more people could live on the Earth if we dammed up all the rivers and the lakes and the oceans and then people would have so much more space to move and live and breathe. Dad gave me a subscription to *Discovery*, which I don't really like because it's kind of boring, but I read it anyway because it would hurt his feelings if I didn't. He also gave me a pair of purple Mary Janes once because, I don't anymore, but I used to wear only purple. But I hated those shoes. But I couldn't tell him that I would never never ever in a million years wear them because he was so sure that they'd be my favorite. Anyway. It said in one of the *Discovery* magazines that the population density of the Earth is something like 117.2 people per square mile (129.3 if you don't count Antarctica), which makes me hyperventilate a little. But, if we dammed up all the water, we'd still have to make sure the levees didn't break.

What if all the extra water were frozen so that it would never flood? That way there would always be plenty of ice sculptures, and it wouldn't be a big deal if one thawed during a wedding, or whatever ice sculptures are used during. If the angel melted, then there could just be a conveyor belt that instantly replaced it with a new one, as crisp and cool as ever. Sometimes I think it'd be fun to send all the water into outer space so that there wasn't

such a thing as drowning and everyone'd be safe even if the all the angels did melt.

I've only ever ridden in a helicopter twice. The first time wasn't so bad because I was unconscious because of my fall from the monkey bars. The second time was awful, even though the helicopter was super. I asked if we could fly over the city so that I could see my house and even though it probably would be the size of a monopoly house, I still wanted to see it, and when you think about it, why not? No one listened to me even though I asked six times. Then I realized that I wouldn't be able to see anything anyway since it would all be under water and then I didn't want to see it. I had these big earmuffs on my head that made me feel like Princess Leia, which is a character in Dad's favorite movie. Thinking about Dad made the air really thin, and I wanted to draw a tattoo on my forearm, but I didn't have my blue sharpie, so instead I imitated the sound of the helicopter. The lady sitting across from me looked at me like *What the?* but I didn't feel like I needed to stop since what people thought didn't really matter.

Diane took me back to New Orleans six months after the funerals, though they weren't really funerals since we didn't have anything to put in the graves, except dirt. Before they sent me away, Dad always tucked me in and then told me a story about whatever he wanted. The last night he tucked me in, he told me about Custer and the Battle of Little Bighorn, which was a story he loved. He always told me stories that other people thought were only for grown-ups, like about Hiroshima and the original version of Cinderella where the wicked step-sisters cut up their feet with butcher's knives to make them fit in the glass slipper. "You know, sweetie, that battle was a horrible loss for the U.S. Army and should have shown them the folly of pride and the power of the Indians." "Native Americans." "No interrupting." "Yeah, yeah. It's annoying." "Yes, it is." He winked at me, which is something he didn't do with anyone but me. "Back to my story. Before he was killed, Custer shouted to his men," he hunched over his shoulders and scrunched up his brow so that he looked kind of like a hermit, but I don't really know why, and told me with a silly Southern twang, "'Hurrah boys, we've got them! We'll finish them up and then go home to our station.' And then he was shot." "In the head?" He paused and ruffled the scruffy bits on his chin. "You know, I don't really know." "Well that's lame," I told him. "Yeah, it is." Then he chuckled a throaty little laugh, kind of how I always imagined Boris Badenov would laugh. "And now, it's bed time, little missy!" He pulled the covers up to my chin, which I hated but never told him and then kissed my forehead, which I loved but never told him and then he was at the door.

"Dad?" "Yeah, sweetie?" "Nothing."