

*And did those feet in ancient times
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

The Jerusalem hymn, by William Blake is the closest we come to prayer in the Chapel. Despite our non-religious intentions, the Chapel looks like a place of worship. The vaulted ceiling supports dangling lanterns, casting hazy yellow light over squeaky parquet and rows of antique pews. The well-worn stage is built out for the fall play so you can't see the creaky stairs whose slippery surfaces challenge my balance and poise on a regular basis. The girl giving her senior speech today isn't particularly poised either. Her hand trembles when she pauses to take a sip of water before returning to her diatribe on how we can turn Barbie into a feminist role model.

Three huge windows dominate the left wall of the Chapel, facing the flagged courtyard. Sunlight streams in, highlighting motes of dust that float above our heads. I briefly wonder if those dust particles are remnants of the asbestos they removed while renovating the room last year. Despite a full year of construction as well as many other renovations in the last century, the Chapel has always looked roughly the same.

The archives are full of pictures showing the remarkable events that have happened in the Chapel since Sarah Lyman built our school in the 1920s. 80-some years of girls in forest green standing on the dark wood steps and acting on the paint-speckled stage.

*And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?*

"You have really nice boobs."

I don't know the shaggy-haired boy who wants to discuss my body parts, and I don't know whose homecoming date he is. Before I can walk away, his date walks up.

"No Hannah," she says, a little spacier than usual. "Tom's right. You have really nice boobs."

The lights are off and I search the room for my own date, hoping that he notices me before my brother does.

For a moment, I'm not really sure what's worse. That my classmate and her boyfriend are harassing me about my newly sprouted breasts, that my date has abandoned me or that my

brother is probably watching the whole interaction. It's the first time in 8 years I've ever been uncomfortable in the Chapel. With the music blaring and strobe lights flashing, it's unlikely either my date or my brother will find me.

I wish I had better luck. My brother's found me; his best friend has come too.

"What are we talking about?" my brother asks, looking for an excuse to embarrass me.

The black haired girl answers matter-of-factly, "Hannah's boobs." My brother's face pales and he walks away.

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;

Bring me my Arrows of desire:

Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!

Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I'm hoping that Mr. Connell doesn't notice I'm wearing a red undershirt. I'm out of uniform and it's the third time this month. "Maybe," I think, "I can slip into the bathroom after Chapel to take it off before I go to his class." I adjust my navy sweater as best I can so he doesn't see the fire engine red poking out between the buttons on my dingy white polo. No such luck. He's spotted me and is glaring through his thick glasses, but not at my throat where my red undershirt threatens to gain me a demerit.

Oh. That.

He's staring at the bulge on my right hip. The green and white plaid of my uniform kilt stretches to cover half of an apple from lunch. It's wrapped in a napkin, growing brown and sticky. I was saving that to eat before rehearsal.

His gaze throughout the speaker makes my skin crawl, prickling like the itchy fabric of the chair against my thighs. I can feel the silver-haired man staring at me. I imagine he's thinking of new ways to make me miserable. I'm one of his favorite students, but that's not going to save me when he sees food in my pocket and bright red peeking out from the v of my shirt collar.

The girl sitting next to me nudges me in the ribs and gestures towards our hawkeyed teacher. She shrugs minutely as if to say, "What gives?" I wave a hand over my straining pocket and spell the word apple in sign language. I look over towards Mr. Connell again and he raises his eyebrows. I try not to fidget while I listen to the rest of the speaker.

He's in a good mood today, waiting until Chapel is over to accost me. I half expect him to grab my ear and drag me across the hall to his classroom. Not a word passes between us as he glances again at my pocket and then at the black garbage can by the door. I smile sheepishly and

fish around in the starchy plaid fabric that's dominated my life since I was 7. Retrieving the fruit from my pocket, I shrug and toss it into the "proper receptacle."

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land*

The Theater teacher is a peculiar man, but his temper tantrums have endeared him to me all the same. The Chapel is his domain, from the lime green back room to the costume shop underneath the stage. It's all his. The moody outbursts only come when you threaten it.

In class he praised me, perhaps only for my respect, perhaps because he thought I had true talent. When it came time to assign parts, I could only think he hated me. Year after year, I was assigned seemingly small parts that took serious concentration to even consider. The other girls were princesses and heroines. I was cast as a cleaning lady and a demon.

At 12, I didn't understand why he wanted me to play Maudie, the old woman who cleans the Tower of London while the other girls played ghosts of the women who died there. At 15, I didn't understand why he wanted me to be a toddler trapped in a painting, explaining sex has something to do with spaghetti and complaining to her sisters about having had to go to the bathroom for the last hundred and fifty years. Going back to visit the odd man now, I know why.

When I come in, he's sitting on the creaky stairs while a student adjusts the spotlights for an upcoming play. The light focuses in the appropriate spot, making his age apparent. Despite the wrinkles crawling over his face, he's still boyish and full of mischief.

"You've always reminded me a bit of Peter Pan," I said to him. "It's like being in this room makes you never have to grow up."

He turns his head in contemplation, "I don't know Hannah. You've done a lot of growing up in this room."